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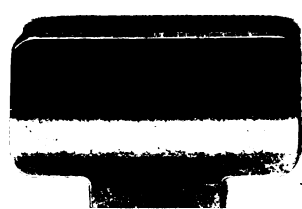
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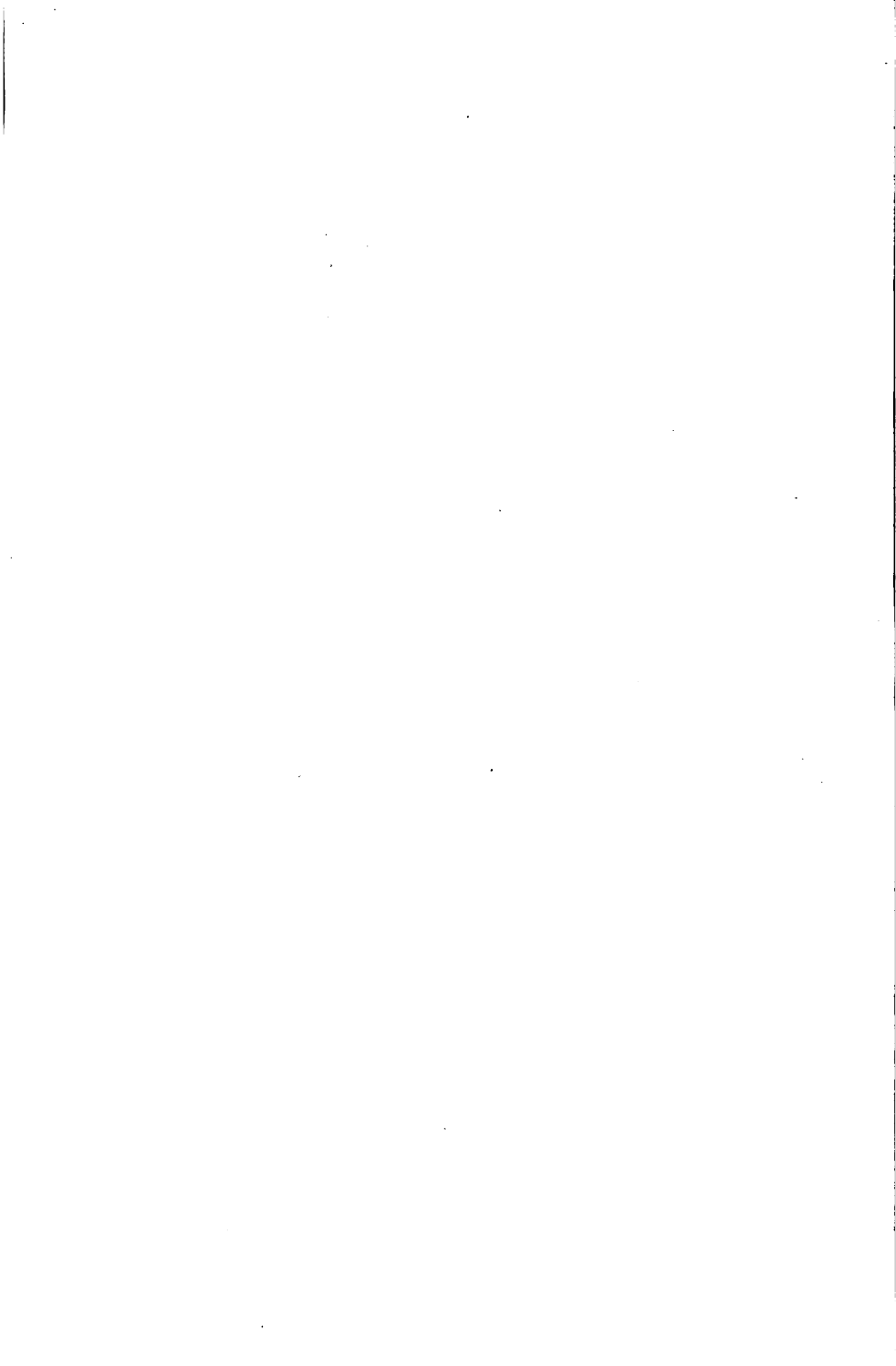


Maximilian Foster





In the Forest







“Roaring in frenzy, the older bull upreared, wavered, and crashed backward.”

In the Forest

Tales of Wood-Life

By

MAXIMILIAN FOSTER



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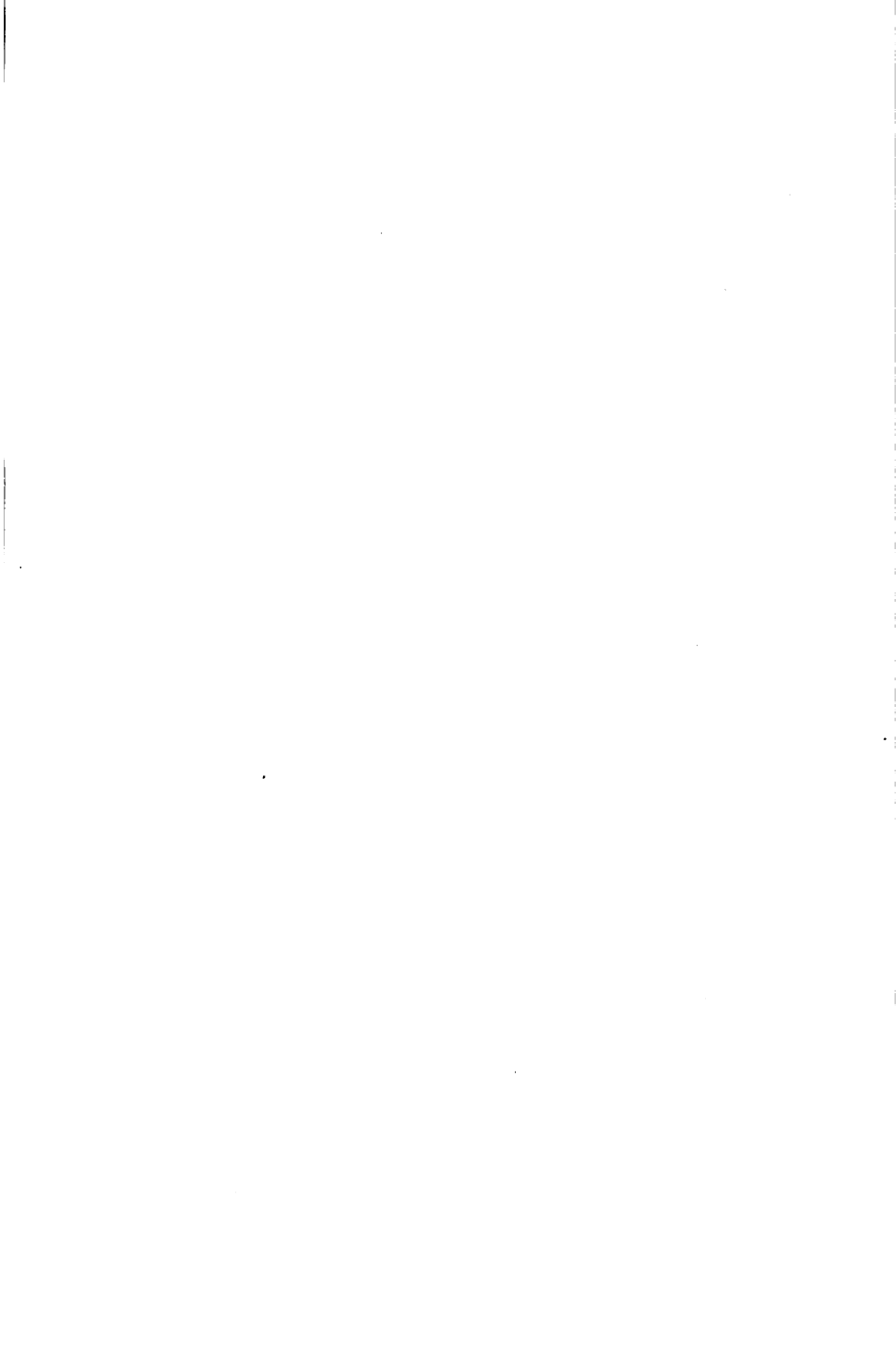
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In the Forest.

CHAPTER I.

THE CONQUEROR.

A WAY by the head of the forgotten Mamoziekel lies a barren — a gray solitude in the depths of the untraversed woods. Grim hills of mystery look down upon it, and the forest, pausing at its edge, overshadows quagmires working darkly like a witch's pot. Man is seldom there. Its waste is given over to the sombre moose and to herds of woodland caribou, stray voyagers of the wilderness who track in from the runways leading to the south, and go unchallenged across its breadth.

There came a wind from the north. It drew down the flank of the mountain, sheeting the landscape with a pall of flying vapour,

roared a moment on the forest-edge, and swept across the barren. Night was falling. The last daylight glimmered in the west, and hastening clouds streaked the horizon in the van of the coming storm.

On the brink of the black pool at the centre of the barren stood a herd of caribou, their heads uplifted, staring. A moment before there had been peace — quietly feeding, they had straggled across the bog. But now battle was in the air. On the flank of the band stood the herding bull — a great, white-maned creature, gray on the flanks, whose crowning antlers upreared over the cows like a guarding weapon. Beyond him pawed the challenger, once tolerated in the herd, but now, with the rut strong upon him, bawling defiance at the leader. They were sire and son. Across the shoulders of each ran a broad, white band, an unusual marking among the caribou. All day the younger had been beating the alders with his horns; now he was wildly eager for the fray. *Ruh-rr-r!* he bellowed gutturally.

The gale had lulled a moment, and in the sudden quiet, the sound volleyed across the interval. An uneasy tremor moved the herd; it bunched in its agitation, the cows huddling about their principal. The swollen neck of the herding bull bristled. Snorting an answer, he breasted the cows aside, his call of war ringing clear across the gathering night. Pawing the sodden earth, he pushed forward, "brattling" in rage. After years of mastery, should his sway be now disputed? Here was the bidding of Nature—once more the struggle for mastery.

Roaring, they crashed together. With a ringing stroke their antlers met, and, heads down, they wrestled across the mossy flooring of the bog. Their breaths whistled stridently, and the ground thudded beneath their quick-flying strokes. Night resounded with the clang of horn on horn. Nervously the cows looked on, or, again, in the lulls of the combat, stamped the bog. Sometimes they trotted to and fro along the flanks of the combat; sometimes they blatted,

their staccato complaint urging on the fighters.

Weakness fell upon the herding bull, long time master of the ranges. He felt his power slipping from him. Conqueror in half a hundred battles, he was himself to taste the bitterness of defeat. Against his stout antagonist, whose thews and sinews were an inheritance from himself, his stand was short. His breath failed, and every voice gasped agony as it whistled from his lungs. The younger bull plied on with added fierceness, hurling his bulk against the tottering defence, beating down the swaying head—striking, stabbing as he would. Roaring in frenzy, the other bull upreared, wavered, and crashed backward as the other goaded him with piercing tines. A moment he lay inert; then, tottering to his feet, he fled, his implacable enemy following, driving him from the place.

A sudden flaw swept again across the barren, and the wind hummed among the spruce like a sound of gales upon the sea.

The cows had wandered on, and with backs to the gusts, were feeding before the storm, indifferent now to the outcome of the fray. They had passed the pond hole, when across the bog came a rattle of hoofs clicking like a dancer's castanets. They threw up their heads and tried the air. Then they faced the storm, and out of the blinding rain-sheets came the conqueror, his neck still ruffled and his eyes still red from rage. He called once, they answered softly, and they were gone together — fleeting spectres vanishing into the gloom. It was but the way of Nature — the survival of the fittest.

With the deepening of the snows, the battling rage of the bull died out. Yet he still held sway over the herd, leading it proudly from range to range. Their old leader was gone — exiled, an outcast. Together the band tracked the wilderness — here one day and gone the next, yet ever returning to the big barren of the Mamoziekel. In broad daylight they kept to the open country, for their lord was not the usual caribou bull,

who skulks halting through the bushes. His craft seemed infallible; his nose keen to detect danger in the wind. So he led bravely.

Through the long winter they hovered about the barren. Sometimes, after a heavy wind, they voyaged through the forest to feed on the lichens blown down with broken limbs and tree-tops, but in the deep snow their usual food was the moss on the big barren. In its centre were no drifts, and they pawed away the white covering and fed fatly upon the food beneath. Still wind and weather told. Before the new year had come, their coats were growing streaky yellow, the hair long and heavy, and their round barrels were gradually flattening out.

The bull no longer wore his crest with pride. It seemed a useless burden. He faced the wind with a lowered head, and about the bases of his horns crept an itching soreness. As he straggled into the wracked, distorted depths of a cedar swamp, he struck

his antlers against a tree, and one antler dropped to the ground. Then he forged along, lop-eared and lop-headed, a most dejected-looking royalty—for all like a tipsy princeling with coronet askew. But a day later he revived; the other horn followed its mate, and, relieved of the uneven burden, he skipped across the barren at an eager pace, the snow flying in clouds under his cracking hoofs. The cows followed, and working to the northward he crossed the timbered valley, swung up over the ridges, and bore away to Nictau. Through the forest they kept their unbroken gait, their broad hoofs carrying them gallantly over the snow-drifts, and, at length, burst forth on the frozen surface of the lake. The sun shone, the air was crisp and invigorating. Like kittens they gambolled up and down the broad expanse. At night they fed in the black swamp at the eastward, and with the rising of the moon filed again across the ice, bound for a far-away range on the headwaters of the Sisson Branch.

The winter passed, and there was promise in the air. Flights of wild fowl, gossiping high overhead, sped northward to the breeding places; and on the mountain's southern slopes the ground was bursting with new life. The winter uneasiness of the herd had waned; they sought for a summer resting ground, and in swift passages southward drove the bewildered moose floundering from many a winter yard. But, after all the wandering, the herd returned once more to the big barren, and in a thick swamp just at its head cast themselves down to settle for the season.

Domestic affairs occupied their time. The bull's horns had just sprouted, when a heavy cow bore into the world a little awkward stranger. It was an uncouth youngling indeed. Its feet seemed out of all proportion; it was knock-kneed and hardly bigger than a dog. The bull clung about idly while this offspring was delivered into the world, and at dawn slouched into the covert where the mother cow lay huddled, the weak-

ling at her side. He gazed at the calf—the clumsy, spindle-legged creature with the spreading, splay feet—and sniffed as if in scorn. But still the calf was big—a bull, and, like its sire, curiously marked with the band of white across its withers. It shuffled loosely to its knees as he loomed over it, and the cow, reaching forth, steadied it with her head until it stood, with legs far apart, for the first time on its feet.

Seemingly, the calf gave little concern to the bull, for the surly leader had troubles of his own. His head was swollen about the pedicles of the growing horns, and all his attention was required to pick a painless way for himself through the forest arches. Moreover, the flies had come with the first warm weather; life was hardly worth living when they grew attentive, and there was no peace without a lake or mud-wallow handy. Two pads of velvet on the sides of his head showed where the new antlers were sprouting, and as they pushed forth he scratched them delicately with the point of his hoof.

They were sore — very sore, indeed — and he moved about in moody dignity.

When the weather grew warm in earnest, and the calf was able to frisk about with his fellows, the herd's longing took them tripping from one lake to another. In the clear, cool water they swam and wallowed. Sometimes they fed on the water grasses, but their main food was still lichens. They did not often browse, as the moose do, on the tender sprigs, and when they did, they plucked at the buds instead of nipping them clearly. An Indian, seeing their work, would have known it from the browsing of the moose. "Moose ben here, sartin" — pointing to a clean-cut twig. "Hunh! that caribow feller!" — pointing to a fractured one.

During the day they clung to the heart of the deepest swamps, and at night tracked the shores of the black ponds and pug-holes. There was one mud-pit in an opening on the ridges which they often favoured, and here the bull, his cows, and the calves would wallow in pure delight. Garbed with black

slime from head to foot, they were a rowdy crew, but the morning dip in the lake made them once more presentable. It was a grand life, and they waxed fat and happy.

One warm afternoon, just after the last snow had vanished from the hollows under the hills, the herd bore down the slope of Bald Mountain, and swung away toward Bathurst. When they struck into the flat lying between, the bull paused and threw up his head. A faint air strayed about the valley, and, as a cross-current swept overhead, the bull caught a warning scent—the rank taint that betrayed the presence of a foe. He sniffed heavily, his nose wrinkling as he sought another gust, and was just tentatively stepping onward, when there was a resounding crash in the bush.

A black form hurled itself upon him. He saw the creature jump—a great hulk of fur—saw its distended jaws and horrid shape. One instant he stood appalled, then with a violent thrill he leaped aside. It was

a bear, a lean, ravenous creature, not long from its winter den, and wild with hunger. As the bull jumped the bear shot by, missed its stroke, but by chance gashed a cow cruelly along the shoulder. She was a big one, an anomaly that boasted a small set of horns. Bawling with fear, she wheeled and fled, a flap of skin hanging from her shoulder, and blood streaming along the brown forest. Crashing forward with frantic jumps, the herd cleared the perilous neighbourhood, and once free from the peril, dropped into their swinging trot, while from the rear came the bear's long-drawn howl of disappointment.

As they clattered along the back-trail fresh disaster awaited. Beyond the spur of the ridge, they crossed down toward the lake, and were clattering along the game-trail at its edge, when the cows halted abruptly, spun about, and fled, the calves shambling at their heels. The bull stopped in wonder. He tried the air, and scented a strong, pungent odour — saw a wisp of

blue smoke crawling over the tree-tops, and, for the first time in his life, beheld a man. Cautiously he drew near, vainly trying for a scent. He saw the figure at the fire start up, and then a ripping crash thundered along the forest. The bull jumped. He did not know he had been fired on, and in mild curiosity skipped through the bush and circled the camp. There a sudden suspicion seized him; he plunged about, and in a long, swinging stride took away on the trail of the cows.

On the Bathurst carry he overtook them. The cows and calves were ambling along the open path, still nervous with vague terrors. They had escaped so far, but what was in store? The bull took his place at their head, resolved that peace and quiet must be sought far away from here. As they dipped down over the crest of the divide, and neared an abandoned beaver-meadow, he swung out, mindful of his horns, from under a leaning tree-trunk that had all the semblance of a windfall. But

the cows kept straight on. Crash! The windfall fell thunderously, filling the silent forest with reëchoing noises. The bull leaped as if struck. Beneath the heavy tree lay the leading cow, her back broken, writhing in a last mortal effort. She had walked into the trap, sprung the trigger, and the dead-fall had slain her, as its builders had devised. They were the poachers in camp on the lake—bear hunters—and this was their method of getting bait for bruin.

The bull circled about the dying cow, powerless to aid. He sniffed the air, and hung over his stricken mate, trotting to and fro with futile energy. A gust stirred the tree-tops, and whirling along the ridge, set down toward him. Snorting anew, he threw up his head and looked. He saw two figures running swiftly along the trail—saw them stoop and point forward, and once more the forest resounded with the rifle's deafening noise. The herd broke and ran in every direction, leaving him

there alone. Once more there was a loud report, a gush of flame—the man had fired and missed again. But as the lead stirred the hair on the bull's shoulders, he shook himself together from this mad fascination and fled—away from the direful place and the cow heaving in a convulsion of death upon the forest floor.

The herd was gone, and he a wanderer alone. He followed to the north, searching far and wide. He tried the unknown barrens under the flank of Bald Mountain, swept about the edge of the long ridges, and circled the headwaters of the Mamoziekel. But they were gone, he knew not where. Alone and weary, he kept up the days of weary pursuit, felt the summer slip by, and, with the first frosts, was touched, once more, with the rutting wrath.

They told in the settlements of a caribou bull—a mighty straggler from the herds, bigger than any man had ever seen before. He was using along the great range west-

ward of Nictau, and twice, they knew, he had been fired upon. Once blood had been drawn, but the men on the trail were no match in speed or stamina for this solitary, and had given up the chase after weary miles, convinced that the wound was slight. His antlers were a marvel; they spread like the brown roots of a hemlock windfall, and down the centre of his nose ran a brow-palm, as big and broad, almost, as the shovel of a moose. Vainly they sought for a nearer shot; but his craft foiled them. At the first suggestion of danger he was gone, vanishing like a spectre.

Fear had taught its lesson to the big bull. He had renounced his first swaggering indifference, and now skulked and treaded as timorously as any creature on the range. He followed the wind keenly, and on the rising ridges looked over for possible foes before revealing himself. He no longer swam the ponds in daylight, and rarely moved except at night. But among the caribou he was still master. He fought from

range to range, forever looking for the lost herd, but the snows came again, and he had not found it. Sometimes he forgot his terrors, and ran through the forest, pausing on the ridges to roar a challenge or a call. But it was of no avail, and, at last, in a sudden access of fury, he fell upon the leader of a passing herd, beat him down, and, victorious, thrust his companionship upon the cows.

Year after year he kept on. His rage was masterful. He harried and abused and drove from the hills the bulls that sought to withstand him. He rounded his cows about roughly, hectoring them at every turn. At the beginning of every rut he fell in a fury upon the spike-horn yearlings, and gored cruelly, driving them from the herd. Perhaps he was in mind of how he himself had come into power over his own sire. In this warfare he wandered far from the barren of the Mamoziel, carrying dismay before him. Yet in his heart there was ever a longing, a desire to return and once more be with

the lost herd, to go back to the place of his birth as every caribou goes.

Years passed and he grew old. His horns had increased in size and strength while his vigour held, but now that age was coming, he noted a difference. At last one autumn found him with diminished weapons. In the place of the centre palm was only a spindly tine. Moreover, his antlers did not reach so far, nor were they so stout about the beams. Still he felt no relaxing of his ugly humours, no weakening of his might. He held his sway unchecked, and when other bulls came up against him, he forced the conflict to a swift and powerful climax.

His fear of men had become a second nature. He steered wide of ranges where he had heard the rifle speak doom to other caribou. Nor did he relax his vigilance, like the other bulls, when law forbids the shooting. He took no chances, and so survived. Then one day the fit to wander homeward fell upon him. He shacked to his feet, and roared. The cows arose, and, at the sound,

another bull came challenging up the slope of the ridges. He was big, and the battle waxed furious. At its height still another bull, an interloper, stole in and drove away the cows. Thus, when the conflict ended, and the challenging bull had been driven crashing through the thickets, he again found himself alone. He stood for a while and called. But there was no answer, no clatter of the brush betokening their return. Darkness fell upon the forest, and turning his head southward, he sped away, homeward — back to the black headwaters of the Mamoziekel and the big barren that still lay unchanged, to the forest where axe never sounded nor rifle spoke. Hope sprang high in his heart — the lost herd would be found.

Into this wild came, the day after, a man. He had followed the long valley of the stream that runs into Nictau, setting a course along the ridges that back up the southern slope of Bald Mountain. He pushed out upon the barren, and halted, studying the tracks that marked the black

ooze of the quagmire. Presently he stooped, with wide eyes studying one great track that punctuated the writing of trafficking herds. The slot was big and broad, more than a hand's-breadth across, and, with the twin dots of the accessory hoofs, almost as long. Rising with a gesture of eagerness, he sped along, studying the ground.

Overhead, a skim of dull vapour cast across the zenith, and the wind, moaning fitfully among the tall spires of the pines and spruce, betokened the approach of snow. Abruptly the man turned aside from the trail, plunged into the edge of the forest, and threw down his pack. Pushing aside the bush, he crouched there, his rifle ready.

In a thicket farther up the bog lay the big bull. Here in this retreat he was nursing the wounds of battle—stiff and sore and ugly.

A twig cracked on the hillside. His neck bristled, and he heaved himself to his feet. Across the open he saw a cow steal to the edge of the woods and peep forth. Another

followed, then came a pair of skipping calves and two more cows, one a shoulder-scarred creature with small horns. A tremor seized him. He saw the familiar forms, the gray figures of old, the calves band-streaked across the withers—the lost herd! He pushed from the thicket, calling madly, and at the same moment another bull stepped into the open in the train of the advancing cows.

Across the shoulders of the newcomer was that same distinctive mark. His own memory went back to the day when this great, gallant creature was but a weakling come into the world in this same swamp. And now it had grown to this proud estate! Year after year it had clung to the herd. As a yearling it had been tolerated by the usurper who had found the stray herd when they lost their leader in the disaster of the trap. But with its second year and its first long spikes, it had been browbeaten, pushed, and driven about. Still it had kept by the same little family, returning in peace when

the rut was past. Again in the third year it had fought and failed; but in the fourth it arose, mighty in strength, well armed and headed, and falling upon the bullying lord of the herd, drove him forth, stricken and cowed.

At a sharp trot the band moved down the wind. Forward stepped the old bull. His head was uplifted with its still mighty crest, and there was a new fire in his eye. He gazed at the cows and at their leader. He stretched his throat and called anew, and at the racketing call, they halted in their tracks.

The younger bull stopped, stamping. The hair on his neck ruffled; he spread his feet and bellowed a challenge. Who was this come to dispute his sway? His petulant hoof pawed the earth, and gutturally he gave the call of war.

The sound rang down the barren, stirring the man crouching in the thicket. At the challenge the old bull tossed his antlers. Before, he had never hesitated; but now

he did not rush to battle. Old memories, perhaps, were in his mind, and in his heart peace. But the challenge was renewed; the other was advancing. With lowered head the younger bull stepped along, fire in his eyes. *Ruh-rr-r!* he roared — *ruh!*

They advanced, the old bull half temporizing. He called plaintively, but the other took no notice of the appeal. Nearer he came — nearer and nearer, and the man, crouching in the thicket, cocked his rifle, waiting.

A sudden scurry of hoofs beat upon the bog. With a frenzied effort the younger bull burst upon the other. The big one fell back, unwilling for combat, but once more the young one charged. Startled, the old bull recoiled again, and the younger, breaking through his guard, stabbed him on the flank.

A pang rang through the old caribou's nerves, and a roar escaped him. He forgot all; his wrath, his fear, perhaps, aroused. Once more the blood ran hotly through

his veins, and he turned upon his antagonist, mad for the fight.

Their heads shocked together, and the forest threw back the sound in clattering echoes. The torn and trampled moss flew about and blood-streaked froth flecked their heaving shoulders. Again they lunged, the antlers locked—one striving for mastery; the other—knowing it—for life. Once the old bull was forced back upon his haunches, and was all but lost. By a mighty effort he writhed free and recovered. Then he whirled upon the other, and strove to beat down his crest. He was sublime, yet he failed—and terror choked him.

A flurry of snow sped across the bog, the first of the dying year. It wheeled across the landscape for an instant, blotting out the fray. The man, crouching in the thicket, drew a hand across his eyes, almost appalled at the fierceness of this strife. Slipping out upon the barren, he crawled toward them.

The younger bull drew on. With un-

abated strength he beat and battered at the swaying antlers of his adversary, and inch by inch drove him back. His rage was direful. The cows, trotting up and down the arena, called piteously; yet the strife went on. At last, with an overwhelming effort, the younger bull drove upon the other. He hunched his shoulders, struck with destroying force, and as the old bull staggered for an instant, half-reared, and turned aside, he struck still again, another mighty blow. Down went the old bull, a brow-tine piercing him to the vitals. He struggled once to his knees, turned with a despairing call to the cows, and died.

Back from the forest blew the wind, laden with a terrifying taint. One breath of it sent the cows streaming in every direction. But the conqueror gave no heed. He stood over the dead, lifted his crest, and gave the call. Blood and froth flecked his white mane; the steam spumed from his wide-pressed nostrils.

A moment's silence—then from down

the bog streamed a spear of flame. The hills harked back with thundering echoes. Again a shot! High into the air leaped the conquering bull, and fell, kicking spasmodically, across the form of the other.



"High into the air leaped the conquering bull."

CHAPTER II.

TERROR — THE STORY OF A DEER'S LIFE.

SPRING touched the last snow in the gul-lies, and through the gaps the brooks roared, leaping down the slope toward the blue reaches of the lake. Mount Morris, shrouded on the flanks with streaming vapour, loomed overhead, and on every side lay the forest, dotted in the distance with yellow clearings — islands in a wind-swept sea of greenery. Broken ridges lay at the east, and at the south and west the hills rolled down to the flat country where Bog River winds — a silent stream drifting between tangled thickets and the morass.

The brush parted and a spotted fawn looked out. Its nose — a black dot against the livelier colour of its hair — wrinkled at a passing gust, and its ears pricked to and fro. Somewhere out on the lake a loon was

babbling to its mate — a laughing, mindless burst of sound flung back in gossiping echo from the hills. The fawn paused, dismayed. "*Blaa-aa-a!*" it cried; and, at the call, the mother doe stood out, a timorous yellow creature, slinking through the alder thickets. She harked a moment to the lake bird's cry, and then together she and the fawn passed along the shore, their way upon the edge of the burnt ground and the black timber near the falls. Farther on were the lower sheets of the river — the brown dead-water where the first pads of the season were sprouting from the lily roots. But at the crook of the bay, where Jenkins Brook pours down the slope, the doe flung up her head and stopped.

There was something in the wind, a faint, indefinable odour. The air-current faltered a moment and then flew about, eddying up the valley of the stream, and was gone. But still guardedly the doe went on, the fawn skipping along the trail, unmindful of all the world.

They crossed the flat and came out through a copse of birch poles upon the river bank. Beyond lay the big clearing, and at its farther edge the old camp on the carry. A thin wisp of smoke trailed from its chimney, and in the dusk its window gleamed, staring like an eye toward the black forest. Along the ford pattered the doe, the fawn still skipping at her heels, and heaved up the bank. A breeze sighed in the tops, swirled toward her, and — bump! bump! — twice she jumped and, panting, stood still.

Somewhere was a dog. The rounding breeze had brought the scent, but from the baffling air she could not tell the direction. The spotted fawn, halting and curious, sniffed noisily, stretching out its little nose and wagging its ears like hanging chestnut leaves. Then two small white forms came tumbling out of a bush and faced them.

They were dogs, sure enough — the wind told that. But they were small, very small — mere puppies, in fact. They saw the deer

and stopped suddenly, so suddenly that one of them almost turned a somersault. *Ooof!* it said in astonishment. They sat down, their tongues hanging out, each puppy with an ear cocked. With their forelegs planted far apart, they stared at the two strangers; then one bounced forward. *Ooof—oof!* he barked. Bump! bump! bump! Away went the doe and the fawn, snorting *whoo!*—*whoo!*—and after came the enemy. They followed, their infant voices yapping shrilly in the evening quiet; and, almost mad with terror, the deer fled, leaping the thickets, thumping and crashing through the woods. Once more they splashed across the stream, and cleared away up the slope, while the hounds nosed, still crying, along the scent till the river cut off the chase.

That was the fawn's first experience of terror. Its next was still more direful. A week had passed, and it lay under a windfall, while the doe went down for a noonday drink at the brook. It crouched in a little nest of leaves, its colour merging closely into the



“The spotted fawn, halting and curious, sniffed noisily, stretching out its little nose and wagging its ears.”

yellow-brown covering of the forest floor; both ears were pressed flat against its neck, and but for the two big eyes, winking and bright, one might have thought it dead. A twig snapped near at hand. The fawn crouched lower, holding its breath, and with its lively eyes peeping all about. Again the brush cracked, and a man stepped out. He had a rod over one shoulder and in his hand was a string of trout. He walked on, scaled clumsily over the windfall, and was just dropping to the other side, when, with an exclamation, he clutched the tree, and hung poised. "Hello!" he cried softly. Just beneath him lay the fawn, limp and simulating death, all but its eyes, which snapped in excitement. Softly the man put aside his rod and fish, and then, inch by inch, slipped down till, with a sudden swoop, he fell upon the fawn.

There was no struggle; the spotted creature rested limply in his arms as though it were dead indeed. Its head hung down, its four legs trailed, and but for the beating of its heart and those two frightened orbs,

one might well have thought it lifeless. For a few moments the man petted the forest stray, blowing softly into its nostrils, and before long the fawn plucked up courage. It stood on its feet, the man's arm about its neck, and made no effort to get free. Presently it licked his hand, and he laughed. He blew once more into its nostrils, picked up the rod and fish, and walked on, looking backward over his shoulder. At his heels tripped the fawn. For a few steps they went along together. "Scoot!" the man cried, waving an arm. "Scoot—I don't want ye." But the fawn still followed. Then the man set down his rod and fish again, and drew a knife from his belt. Its glitter distracted the little creature, and it drew near, sniffing, its innocence manifest. With a swift gesture the man seized the fawn by the ear, crumpled the thin tissue in his hand, and, with a sudden upward stroke, slit a V halfway from the butt to the tip.

"*Blaa-aa-a!*" cried the fawn, overcome with terror and pain. It fled away along

the forest, bounding right and left, and its face covered with blood, while the man, chuckling, went on his way. After that, whenever it fell upon the trail of a man in the woods, it sniffed once and then bounced off, quivering, and with one ear still a sore memory of its adventure.

Midsummer came. On the ridges and in the swamp the black flies, the midges, and the harping mosquitoes grew unendurable. Then the deer took to the lakes at dawn and evening-time, and sometimes in the middle of the day. At the soft edges of the ponds they soused in the tepid water, and fed largely on the lily pads. All were as red, almost, as the maple leaves in autumn, and fat, round-barrelled, and happy. But middle August came, and a sudden change fell upon the forest herds. The fawn, standing one day in the shallows beside the doe and a big buck, saw something come stealing like a spectre across the pond. The buck pricked up his ears and stared, and the thing halted, drifting as silently as a log upon the

water. Again he went on feeding, and the thing moved. The fawn, hardly understanding, saw it slip forward, and once again the buck threw up his head. Then a splitting crash broke the silence, the hills cried back with a thousand voices, and a sound of thunder rolled to the sky. One convulsive leap carried the buck halfway to the shore; again the silence broke with the detonation, and down he plunged, his velveted antlers beneath the water. Why did he fall? Why did he lie there with the shallow about him crimsoned? Rushing to the shore, the doe and fawn sped away, leaving the fallen buck behind.

The fawn had hardly recovered from this adventure, when one night it fed with the doe on the mud-flats of a distant lake. Along the bank they walked — *slosh* — *slosh-slosh* — sometimes pausing to nip at the floating pads. They turned the point, and out of the gloom, more silent than the forest's midnight closes, came a black, formless shadow — a spectre gliding upon the waters.



“One convulsive leap carried the buck halfway to the shore.”

The doe snorted, yet did not move, and at the sound a red eye of light flashed through the blackness, streaming across the bog and transfiguring with its powerful ray the dark edges of the woods. Palsied with fascination, the two stood quivering. A moment's silence followed, a roar burst over the quiet of the night, and the dead forest shocked with reverberating noises. Something flew by the fawn, whistling shrilly as it passed, and the doe was down, struggling. Once she *blaa-aated* despairingly to the fawn, and the agonized creature, understanding the alarm, raced to the shore. But the doe did not follow, and, halting once to look back, the little thing saw the jack-light turned upon the inert form, motionless forever. Peace then passed out of its heart, and, like the other deer, it became a hunted, harried creature. It fled far back among the hills, leaving the ponds and the destroyer upon them, and alone, shy, ever on the lookout, began its life anew.

But even here its peace was broken. One

day, just after the dawn, a thin, piping cry came trailing toward it over the ridges. *Ooo-ooo-o! Wooo-oo-ooof-ooof—ooof-ooo!* It listened, its heart beating madly. A dog—yes! The cry drew nearer—dog music, but in the ear of the fawn a terror-striking clarion, a wild and awful clamour. Remembering its early experience, it sped away toward the lake, the long-drawn howl closing nearer. Panting in horror, it reached the water, and had no sooner set out swimming to the other shore than a boat put off after it. Mad with its fears, it pushed on, half leaping from the water with every stroke. But the chase was short; a hand reached out and seized it by the tail, and with one violent struggle it fell back, waiting dumbly for the stroke of the killer.

“Bless me,” said a voice, “ef it ain’t the fawn I slit along ago las’ spring. Shoo! Git out, there!”

A paddle slatted the fawn upon the back, it was headed toward the point, and scrambling weakly ashore, darted through the woods.

Time came at last when the woods no longer sounded with the rifle's crack, and then fell the snows. Day by day they grew deeper, and the herds, stayed in their wandering, grouped on the slopes of the mountain or sought the hollows at the foot. Their summer coat had changed to blue, a thick, storm-defying pelage. As the drifts grew higher the bucks and does drew together in small bands, and trod down paths, breaking out new ground as the browse grew thinner. Each was stained on the flanks by the riotous weather; their ribs flattened out, their hair grew ragged, and they were a disorderly crew before spring set in on the lowlands. But as the sun grew warmer, as the sprigs of green showed on the southern slopes, a nimble sprightliness infected the deer, and they broke their winter yard, leaping in sport and playing about the mountain. Thus the spring and summer passed, and the fawn had lost its spotted coat. It was now a yearling buck—a lithe, graceful creature, yet ever affected by its terrors.

With the beginning of autumn his fancy fell upon a doe, a stray from the big timber across the lake. He played before it, his gallantries vigorous and sometimes rough, and the doe fled. But the spike-horn followed, nosing along the trail, till, with a sudden clatter of hoofs, another buck rushed from the thicket and confronted him.

“ *Whooo-oo!* ” said the spike-horn, startled. But the other gave him no time to ponder. His neck was big and bristling, and the veins, swollen with blood, had discoloured his eye. Without ado he fell upon this younger rival, jabbed him unmercifully in the flanks, and drove him clattering through the forest. The yearling was dismayed. Heretofore he had looked only on man and dog as perils; but now one of his own kind had arisen, mad and battling, and had well-nigh slain him. Sore and spent, he toiled once more into the hills, and here he learned another lesson.

In the swamp at the foot of the valley was a herd of does, hiding from the gallantries of the bucks. The yearling went among them



"A yearling buck—a lithe, graceful creature,
yet ever affected by its terrors."

and was suffered to stay. But he had hardly come when again he heard the direful cry of a hound, making music on the trail. Together with the herd he ran, and presently saw one of the does, hampered by her fawn, fall back behind. He stopped an instant to listen to the dog; once more the wild clamour of the beast resounded in the forest, and then he knew the chase had set upon him and the following doe. She was breasting through the bushes, the fawn at her heels, but she had no sooner caught up to him than she leaped aside. Bewildered, he followed, and again she turned. Again and again she tried this tactic, till, more confused than ever, he kept on his way. Much ground had been lost; the hound was drawing nearer. He heard another voice strike in — there were two hounds — they were on his track. In a flash he understood the doe's antics. She had deliberately cast him in the trail, desperate in the effort to save herself and her young. A wild fury seized him. He turned to battle with the dogs, and, stamping the fallen

leaves, he raised the hair on his neck, his eyes red and baleful. Nearer grew the baying, a tempestuous, awe-inspiring riot of noise. He looked along the forest aisles and saw them, the first hounds he had seen since that day when the two puppies had pursued him across the lower stretch of Bog River. One look convinced him. They were the same dogs — big at the shoulder, with drooping ears, and jaws dripping with eagerness. They sighted the waiting deer, and their voices broke into a shrill, maddening clamour. He paused an instant, overcome, and then, his courage failing, whirled about, and, blindly striking through the brush, fled away to the distant shore of Little Tupper.

He had learned at last the one, masterful, selfish lesson of the wilds — the necessity of self-preservation. And in that moment he was changed. All the innocence of the fawn departed, shed like a winter coat in spring. Crafty, sly, and brutally selfish, he took his place among the herds, fought for his own from buck and doe alike, and in the face of

peril became a slinking coward. Again, when he heard the dogs upon his trail, he circled the mountain till he found another deer, and running along the trail a piece, leaped off sideways, leaving the dog to pick up the scent. But when the scent was breast high and the hound followed, however he dodged, he had another trick. He would play on before the chase till he found a stray herd of deer, and, dashing between them, would mix his own track in a confusing puzzle among theirs. He rarely took to water, for experience had taught him that death lay around the ponds, and that no deer could tell when or where a boat was lurking at the shore, ready to set out in pursuit.

Encompassed by all these dangers, he spent his years about the mountain. His antlers grew, and he was strong and vigorous. He could play on for hours before any living hounds, and when he had tired of their attentions, he swung them off upon the trail of others. There were two hounds, however, that he tried no tricks upon — hounds that

hunted in a couple. He dimly suspected that they were his friends of old, the two from the clearing at the head of the lake. Whenever he heard them ranging through the forest, hot on the scent, he sped away, swimming every brook and lake within reach till he had shaken them from his trail. His terrors multiplied whenever they were abroad.

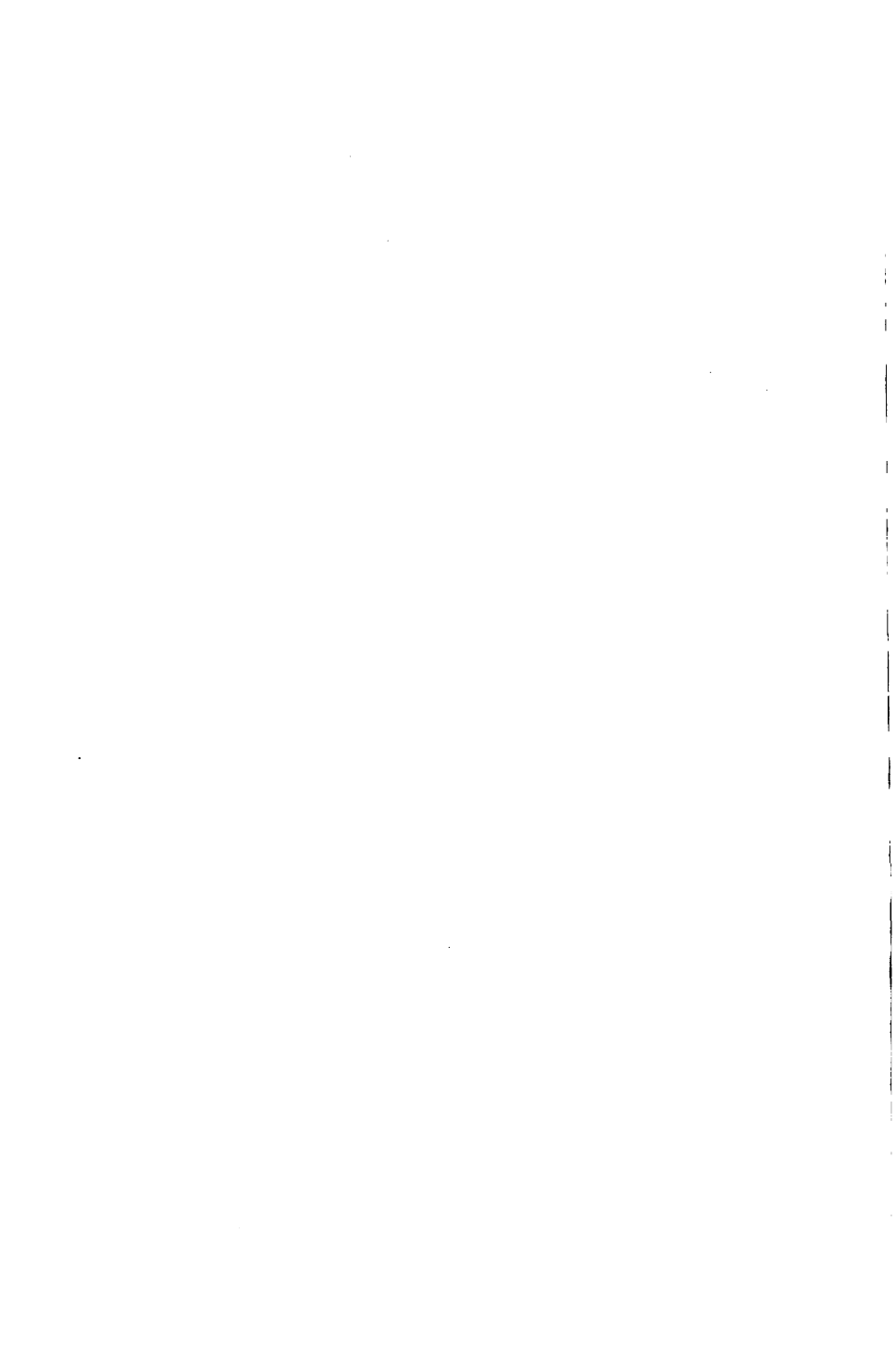
One autumn found him with heavy, branching horns, and a renewed desire for a mate. So he tracked through the forest, pursuing the elusive does that fled before. He had crossed down near the head of Horseshoe Pond, and was climbing a bank, when his feet struck against an upright band — an iron railroad track. He turned aside, and in the open right-of-way found the travelling good. So he kept along in the darkness, and had just turned the bend above the outlet when far away he saw a light, and heard the ground click and tremble beneath his feet. Amazed, he stood and watched, waiting. At direful speed the round orb neared him. It flashed in his eyes, a bewildering planet. A roar-



The Fawn.



The Spike-horn.



ing noise as of a great wind was in his ears, and then the night screamed with a terrifying sound — *hoo — hoo-hoot-hooo!* He wheeled about and fled; he heard the woods din again with the brazen noise, and linked along, racing madly, though ever falling nearer to the monster rushing up behind.

It was almost on him when he leaped aside, and turned, prepared to fight, to die in a corner. But the thing, clouded in white vapour, thundered past, blinding lights flashing before his eyes. When it had gone in a last flurry of dust, he sped away — *whoo! whoo!* — snorting in mad terror. Days after this he clung to a thicket, and each day, at certain hours, heard the dreadful thing rush by, hooting in the distance.

He found his mate at length, winning her after a battle with another buck. The beaten deer was smaller, a weakling before him. The buck, lurking along the Mud Pond trail, saw the pair coming, and like a whirlwind burst upon his chosen rival. They struck together, their horns locked, the spikes of the

younger but a feeble weapon to his own. With a sudden heave he turned the spike-horn buck aside, and gored him cruelly in the shoulder; then, unmercifully goading, prodding with all his strength, drove him down the slope.

In the spring there was another fawn, his own. He suffered it to follow him and the doe about, but that was the end of his care or affection. When the fawn was weaned, and the doe sought out tender sprigs for its browse, when she found a tender mushroom or a lily pad more delectable than the others, she drew the fawn toward her. But often the buck, shouldering them both aside, snapped up the dainty, and at times even fought them away from it. Once, while they were together, a hound sounded upon the trail, and, instead of flying with his mate, the buck rushed around, mixing up the trails, and then sped away, leaving them to their own defence. They escaped the hound, took to a pond, and were overtaken by a waiting boat. But the doe was in poor condition,

the fawn was tabooed by the law, and the waiting hunter let them go. Late at night they found the buck on the upper ranges, idly feeding and quite unconcerned.

Before long the mating time came anew. The buck's antlers hardened sharply, the dead velvet tearing to the butts and hanging in a fringe along his face. During the day he beat his horns upon the bushes, his neck puffing, while his eye grew bloodshot and dusky. For a time the doe stood his crowding, but at last, when he took to harrying the fawn about, she fled, the little creature at her heels. The buck followed, and the mad chase went swinging around the mountain, deep through the heart of the thickest swamp, across the big blow-downs where the trees, in hapless confusion, lay plaited like osiers on the ground. Furiously he made after her, and for days they kept it up, the doe fleeing at every opportunity. Then she subsided weakly; and roughly, more brutally than ever, he drove her on before him.

When the snows came, the buck found a

new peril. He was resting one noon behind a windfall when a stray breeze brought him to his feet at a bound. Along the intervale a man was coming — creeping upon the track, cautiously studying the thickets ahead and at the sides. Quietly the buck arose, keeping the fawn and doe between him and the implacable foe who stole so softly forward. But the man saw him, halted with a gesture abrupt and excited, and at that the buck leaped the windfall and was gone, snorting in alarm. A moment later the woods were rent with the thunders of a gun, and a bullet wheened past his ears. But he was unharmed, and, halting a moment, overmastered by curiosity, he saw the doe and fawn racing after him, and the man again trying vainly for a shot. After this the buck sought out the deepest tangles for his noonday rest, and the chaos of thicket and fallen timber through which he climbed and crawled to his repose baffled even his most persistent foes. He had a way of flattening his horns on his shoulders, and creeping, ferret-like, under windfalls

that a man could hardly pass. Then, when an enemy took up his trail, he could hear him afar, cracking and thrashing through the tangle long before he came into view.

These perils hardly sweetened, at the best, his sullen, burly ways. He shouldered the doe and fawn unmercifully till the snows deepened, and then he subsided. But his greediness did not fail, and the fawn had need to be quick to keep a dainty from this conscienceless, selfish bully.

They joined the gathering herds, and with six other deer yarded on a slope above the flats. The buck, strong and able, trod out paths through the deepest drifts. When the other deer pressed in after him, he remorselessly drove them away, and left them to their own devices, to break through the drifts if they could. Also, when the bleak winds screamed down the mountain from the north, he chose the spot most sheltered, unmindful of the trembling fawn that lay where it might. He was the bully — he ruled, and he knew it.

A heavy storm swept over the forest, sifting a new layer of snow upon the frozen world. After it, the sun peeped out, it grew warmer, and there was a new gurgle and clinking in the ice-armoured brooks. Listlessly the deer shuffled up and down the yard, but the warmth had hardly stirred them when the wind lifted anew, blowing with a savage bitterness from the north. At dawn the snow had crusted, and when the big buck tried to tread down new paths, he cut himself unmercifully about the hoofs. With lolling tongue he was looking out along the forest, debating, when a wild cry—a sharp, querulous howling—lifted above the murmuring of the wind among the trees. *Oof—ooo-oooo!*
Wooo—oof—ooo!

It was a dog. He drew himself together with a shock. Nearer came the sound. With wild eyes he looked along his trail. The dog was in the yard. It was coming! Turning on his heel, he fled, and at the instant the voice of another hound was

added to the clamour. Then he knew. His old enemies had returned.

The buck shot down the open path, starting the other deer. He dashed among them, pushing right and left, agonized in the effort to escape, yet still intent to lose his track among theirs. But at that instant a hound appeared in front; there was a wild babel of dreadful sounds. He saw the dog spring upon the fawn. It fell, struggled madly, and then the hound worried it upon the ground.

Frenzied, the buck turned aside. The dog was in his path, and one stroke of his sharpened hoof would have slain the creature at its work. But his own precious life was at risk. He fled, and, unconscious of the cutting crust, crashed through the forest. Bump—crash—bump—bump! In mad terror he raced along. Once he heard the fawn blat piteously, and the cry quickened him. But he had hardly reached the crest of the slope when again he heard a hound give tongue. He was pursued.

He saw the hound leap from the last path in the yard and come racing after him, sometimes galloping along the crust, and again breaking through. The buck was almost spent; the hound drew nearer, its tongue hanging from its red and dripping jaws. At every step it gave tongue till the forest was filled with the sound.

The buck could go no farther. He turned, his neck ruffled, a red, ugly gleam in his eyes. He was cornered, driven to his last stride, and must fight! *Boo-ooof!* roared the hound. It sprang at his throat, but the treacherous crust gave way, and there it lay at the feet of the buck, wallowing and defenceless.

For an instant there was silence. The dog, bewildered, lay there, the buck looming above it. Then the deer lifted both fore feet together, and with a powerful, sweeping stroke, beat it down. Again and again he struck, furious. The snow grew red beneath his hoofs, and silently he kept on — a wild, remorseless destroyer.



"Lifted both fore feet together, and with a powerful, sweeping stroke beat it down."

Before long the huddled bundle of fur beneath his feet neither moved nor made sound, yet still he kept on. He saw nothing, heard nothing. Fury possessed him.

A man appeared in the brush. He held a striving hound in leash—the mate of the one lying dead in the snow. At sight of the stamping buck the man shouted, while his dog made strenuous efforts to break away. “Down there!” cried the man, beating the creature about the head, but its efforts only grew more frantic. It whined, trembling with eagerness, and then bayed hoarsely.

At the note the buck halted an instant, staring about, his awful fear renewed. He saw the hound break from the leash and spring toward him. Then, wheeling, he fled away again.

His only chance was to regain the yard, to find the tracks of the other deer, and to turn the dog upon their trail. But as he circled down the slope, the inexorable creature at his heels gaining at every bound,

he felt his strength deserting. He plunged on, his tongue out and his eyes wavering. He reached the yard and raced along the path. At the turn he almost fell upon the fawn's inert body. Recoiling in horror, he turned down another path. It ended against a wall of snow, and the dog was close at his heels. There was no retreat. He leaped again upon the crust, and wallowed into a near-by path. Down this he raced, and again it led to the fawn. He tried another path, yet still could not shake the hound from his heels nor find where the other deer had left the yard. Once more he tried and failed—and the hound had him by the throat. Blindly he struggled, striking out with both feet. One crushing stroke fell upon the dog; it gave a long-drawn howl and fell before him. Again he fell upon the enemy, striking and slashing with his sharp fore feet, and as he stood, crushing it beneath him, a rifle cracked in the woods. Then he died.

CHAPTER III.

LEGS — THE STORY OF A COYOTE.

LEGS was a transplanted theory. Normally, he was a coyote born between blizzards somewhere west of the Little Missouri; afterward he was an alien put down in Tennessee. He came east by way of Wichita, Kansas, a rowdy, fuzzy realism of meanness and greed, famine-bred, and with a voice several octaves higher than any harmony pleasing to the human ear. His fear and hatred of man and dog were inbred. In the beginning, when he was still a gummy-eyed cub, a cowboy dug him and his mother and four others of his kind from an earth at the bottom of a cut-bank. His first impression of life was death — the cowboy dragging him into the indecent light of day, where a pack of sheep-dogs was worrying the mangled body of the old

she-coyote. Naturally, he had reason to fear and to hate. Later, he was thrown into a pen at a ranch, where he ran around and around till he was dizzy. Then he fell down and howled, a habit he never outgrew.

The idea that Legs embodied was this. On the plains they credit the coyote with the feet of a centipede and the gait of a limited express. Once started, he is a yellow streak across the landscape, dissolving into the distance like dust before a tornado. But in Tennessee there is a pack of hounds that is also a living symbol of haste, bred down to a perspective point of twenty couples through two centuries of dog. They are the pick of their kind, straight-limbed, full of heart and fire, and as true and remorseless on a scent as the inevitable working of fate. No red fox can lose them in the open, and when scent lies well they make short work of the lazy gray. So Legs came east with others of his kind to try them newly in their speed.

He was put down in the Harris country alone, still a cub and with an outrageous appetite out of all proportion to his size. A long box sunk into the side of a gully was his home, and as its outward end was barred with a grill, his first impressions of the new country were scant. But to his astonishment food was plenty. Once every day a tan-faced man with a black beard fed him beef bones such as he had never eaten before, and with the fulness of food in plenty his ribs filled out until he was like my lady's pug in the parlour. But even in prosperity his meanness could not wane. Whenever the man with a beard brought dinner, Legs snarled and showed his teeth, and at last, with the familiarity that breeds contempt, he helped himself, between bites at the beef, to the man's incautious thumb. Instantly peace departed. The bars were kicked away, and though he retreated snapping and snarling to the rear of the ready-made den, he was dragged forth, and with a parting kick turned out into the wide,

wide world. Then a new life began for Legs.

In the Harris country there are wide reaches of open landscape seamed like a wind-chap with sharp-cut gullies. Big timber, black swamp, and thickets hem in these stretches, prairies in miniature. His first fleeting impression was that a kind Providence had returned him to the plains. But Legs had hardly stretched his eager limbs when he brought up against a neck of woods. Moreover, almost under his pads was the doorstep of a cabin, a good place to prospect about midnight, but no-wise healthy in the full light of day. A dog barked, and he turned aside, slitting the atmosphere toward a hilltop, where he paused and looked back. Far down in the hollows he could see the black-bearded man loping along on a horse, and for a while he sat up on his hams and watched. Then the man disappeared, and he was alone.

Solitude stretched about him. The red orb of the westering sun sank toward the



"Far down in the hollows he could see the black-bearded man loping
along on a horse."

ridges, twilight was coming, and long shadows reached forward from the woods. Then that innate woe which is the heritage of the coyote seized upon him, and he lifted up his thin, keen nose toward the skies. "*Oh—oh-h-h-oo-ooo-hooo—yi-yi-hi!*" he wailed. "*Oh-oh-hh-yi-yi-hi!*" The woods threw back the sound, and a ready answer came from the farm dog far across the rolling plain. Legs cocked up his ear and listened. Again the honest dog bayed at the shrill whisper in the evening wind, that seeking, tremulous note of misery which the coyote voices from his retreat in the arroyos and cañons of his native West. At the foe's reply Legs ruffled the hair upon his yellow neck, snarled till his teeth lay bare, and then, licking his lips savagely, linked away down the slopes. But though he showed this bravery toward the unseen dog, he still kept an uneasy glance over his shoulder after he had slouched down into a vagabond walk.

Hunger oppressed him. Through the

death of his mother he lacked early opportunities, and he had never before been cast upon the world to provide for himself both food and drink. So he howled anew, his querulous note wailing away into the key of the night wind murmuring among the trees. Oh, such sorrow! He sat upon his hams and pointed out the stars with his nose, directing his complaint to the heavens, an eerie, blood-stilling burst of mad babbling. Once more he rose to all fours and slunk along, trying the wind in all quarters for some scent of an evening meal. True to his nature, he circled about, and at length struck upon his own track leading from the box where the wrathful man had bounced him forth with an emphatic gesture of his boot. Sneuff! He drew in a taint of meat—meat seven days old and strong! With a yap of delight he raced along his back track, and a moment later was munching a beef bone before the mouth of the old, familiar den.

The moon came out. He had finished

the bone, mumbling over the flintlike knuckle until at length he reduced it to pulp. Then he wolfed down the splinters, and looked about for more. But there was only a little blood on the gully sand, and after licking this regretfully with his sinuous tongue, he desisted and turned his mind to other woes. An hour before the only sorrow that the world seemed to hold in store was hunger. But now that the edge of appetite was blunted, he found room for other griefs. Oh, how solitary he felt! Once more he squatted on his hams, his fore paws planted before him, and yowled. But it did no good. The vast solitude took up and drowned his voice, and there was no answering cry of a fellow coyote. No doubt he wondered that there should be no mate anywhere in the world. For an hour he rasped his throat, and at length, with a last disconsolate tremolo, ceased, and curled up in his den.

Morning came, and he lay at the mouth of the box, blinking at the light. It was

not good, he knew, to keep such hours, but then he had an instinctive notion that the black-bearded man might return. But the day passed, and he was not disturbed. At nightfall he went forth again in search of food, but, save for an indefinable scent of the blood in the gully sand, he could find no suggestion of dinner. The best he could do was to sniff this ghost of the repast; and, tortured by its hollow mockery, he loped to the nearest hilltop and yelped discords up and down the darkness. In his heart he hated the silence and strove to destroy it. But in the end, silence gained the upper hand; and, disgusted, he slunk off among the gullies.

A week passed, and famine touched him. He looked at his ribs reflectively, and wondered when they would burst through his matted hide. Within, his vitals seemed tied in a double knot that each day drew tighter. Then a kind Providence directed his steps toward a distant field, where a dead crow swung from a stick in the midst

of the withered corn. Time and the wind and weather had fairly desiccated the scrawny bird, until it was like dust in his mouth. But he munched it ravenously, and with hope reviving cast about through the fields.

Once more he had squatted on a hilltop, and was about to raise his song of woe, sorrowful like Ruth among the alien, when something stayed him. A cattle path stretched tortuously down the hill, and in the sharp moonlight he saw a shadowy creature tripping between the walls of grass. A rabbit! He remembered that long ago some one had thrown a live one into his pen at the ranch. All quivering, he crouched, and at the movement, the oncoming quarry, startled, bounced aside, and with tremendous leaps sped away into the darkness. Before Legs had quite made up his mind what to do his dinner had fled, and, mad with anguish, he howled till the hills mocked him with ghastly echoes.

But if there was one rabbit, why not more? Hunger had sharpened his wits. He lolled down the slope, treading cautiously, and passing a fence, peered out into a cotton-field.

There was a rabbit!

Step by step Legs stole toward it. He saw poor Molly Cotton settle down, saw her big eyes grow bright with terror, fascinated at his approach. One step — two — three. He gave a great bounce and landed, snapping eagerly with his distended jaws, and — What misery disappointments hold in store! What sorrows anticipation brings! His teeth met in the ground, and away in the distance Bunny streaked, gone away with the speed of fear. Legs gazed with sorrowing heart about him. He snuffed at the rabbit's form, still warm from the heat of her fur, still redolent of the dinner that was not. The voice of Legs grew so strong in misery that a watch-dog heard, and came bouncing forth, his hair on end, and baying stridently. Then the coyote fled, and at the edge of the swamp bounced another rabbit, almost from

under foot. With an eager yelp he forgot the dog and pursued. But the cotton-tail knew its work, and leaped, full-gaited, into the thickness of a briar patch. A streamer of thorns raked Legs across the nose, another streaked him across the eyes, and "*yip-ki-ki — yap*" he halted, all fours planted forward to stop him. Then, after ruefully rubbing his nose, he slunk home to his den, hunger griping anew within him and disappointment adding to its vigour.

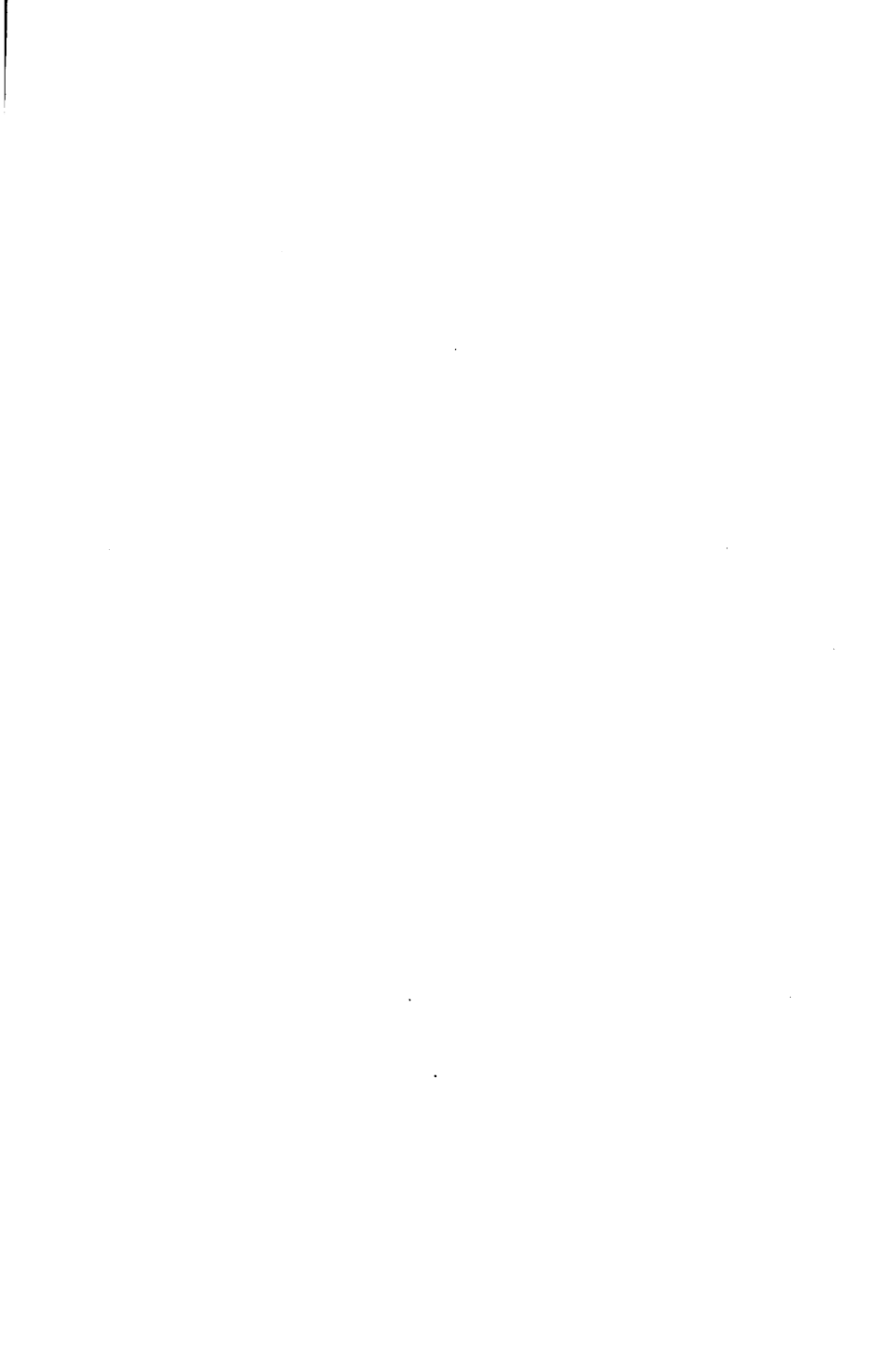
Experience teaches. Legs studied out the problem, and, when night fell again, he was at the edge of the cotton-field, waiting. He lay crouched, lurking in the shadow, and poor Bunny came trotting down her accustomed run. Darkness clothed the tragedy. Who heard the sharp squeal of anguish, the flurry among the leaves, and after that the scrunch of tender bone and the low growl and guzzling of the slayer? Only Legs. He slouched away afterward, grinning, and licking his bloody chops. Again and again a similar tragedy was repeated.

Time passed. Legs took to roaming. He learned the openings, and stretched away ten miles or more on a jaunt. He passed out of the Harris country, trafficked through the bottoms to Coles's Pond, or northwestward into the Sardis ranges. One night he rollicked up from the lowlands, slunk through a deep gully, and rushed the bank. Terror! Right before him was a big house, all ablaze with lights, and a sudden babel of dog music nearly deafened him. With his scrubby brush trailing low, he fled at full speed. But curiosity got the better of him. He sneaked back to the hill and looked. Men — yes — and dogs; many of them. At this point he moved out of the neighbourhood.

One night in the Harris country Legs sat upon a hill, offering his usual obbligo to the skies, when a sudden answer near threw him out of his wits. "*Oo-oh-hh-yi-yi!*" With a complimentary howl, a sudden burst of piping music, he slipped down the hill, leaped a gully, and raced toward the



"Legs."



voice that was cutting the night silence into finger bits.

It was another coyote!

Sniff! Legs dropped to a dignified walk and approached. Ten feet away he dropped on his hams, and with lolling tongue gazed in apparent unconcern at this other stray. Also, the other affected unconcern.

Sniff! They approached. With the gentlemanly inclinations of the coyote, each showed its teeth. Then they trotted apart, performed a few bars of night music, and returned. Each was disposed to hold pleasing discourse with the other, to talk over things, and to seek solace in this solitude. But of a sudden each discovered that the other was not a fair visitant—not of the weaker influential sex—and with that each took hold. The stranger coyote possessed himself of Legs's ear, while Legs took a comfortable hold of the other's fore leg and scrunched. The fur flew, but the stranger, losing interest, withdrew his leg at the earliest opportunity and decamped. Min-

utes later he sat in the distance, mocking the victor's song of triumph.

Legs spent the night and the following day trying all the gullies. He hoped, no doubt, to find more congenial kin. But though there was a she-coyote and her cubs working the ranges still farther at the west, he could find only her half-obliterated trail. Again and again she heard the voice of Legs saw-filing the night away, but, mindful of her cubs and the homicidal appetite of a strange and hungry coyote, she purposely gave no answer. So once more Legs fared homeward across the big gullies — home again to the Harris range.

Life, so far, had been filled with leisure for Legs. But now he was to hustle for a living — not only for a living, but, indeed, for life itself. Impudent and sleek, fatly fed upon the unfortunate rabbits, he turned to other fare, and in an incautious moment helped himself to a goose from a distant farm. He got away with the honker, but near paid for it with his life when the

farmer saw him again. As Legs perched insolently upon a neighbouring mound, reflecting what a sudden dash might accomplish among the geese in the barnyard, the farmer saw him and approached. Legs arose, insolent as ever, yawned, and kept his distance. He was trotting off in surly contempt when the man let go at him with a shotgun, and when the forward pellets struck, Legs performed some surprising movements, howled strenuously, and fled at full speed. Only a shot or so had touched him, and no doubt he outran the rest. Also he had learned the lesson that there are some things in the world that even the legs of a coyote cannot outpace.

A shrill baying disturbed his reflections. Legs loped to the nearest hilltop and looked back. He saw the farmhouse hound draw on, hot-paced, along the breast-high scent. For a moment he watched the lumbering chase, saw the hound range the hill and come rollicking toward the slope, crying eagerly as the scent grew warmer still.

Amused? Legs felt his ruffled feelings fade as he marked his clumsy foe come paddling onward. Then he went down into the dry sand of a gully, and tied his trail in knots. After this he took a side leap, and with his tail airily on high, went elsewhere, while the baffled hound whimpered, at a loss.

Legs had the fun of his life whenever the farm hound was abroad. Sometimes, when life hung lazily upon him, he slipped over to the farmhouse, and mocked the baying dog. He sat upon the hilltops waiting, and when the hound came forth, contemptuously showed himself. But the hound never learned. At full cry he gave chase to this phantom of speed, this yellow something that for a while played on before, to depart at last, a shadow flying across the landscape. Sometimes Legs ran around the hill, worked his patterns in a sand gully, and then sat at the crest watching the baffled hound at work below. Once he led the hound a ten-mile chase across the chap-marked land to a gully where he had found

another box sunk into a bank. Here he backed down, and when the hound tried with gallant eagerness to snatch him forth, Legs sank his fangs deep into the nose of the harrying foe. When Legs chose to let go the nose was abruptly withdrawn, accompanied by remarks in a shrill treble, ending with painful *ki-yi's*. Yet this, the hour of triumph, was the beginning of the end.

The hound came home sore-footed and smeared with blood. "Barb wiah, shuah, sah!" said the farmer. Then, after reflection: "No, sah, not wiah, but that damned coyo-tay!" So formal complaint was lodged against Legs, and horse and hound went up against him.

Legs lay at the head of a gully, considering his digestion and the last Molly Cotton that had come up the trail. His yellow eyes, blinking through their narrow slits, were dull with sleep and the fulness of a square meal. Satisfaction filled him with gentle repose, and he yawned, stretching

his jaws till the serried fangs stood outward, gleaming in relief against his scarlet tongue. "*Ye-ah!*" he yawned, stretching a hind leg. He rolled over anew, and was settling into his sandy bed when something awoke him with a start. He cocked one ear and listened. A note of snarling horn music rang across the opening. It harked like the baying of a distant hound, and Legs arose. He wondered whether his old friend from the farm was on the trail anew, and a shade of annoyance ruffled up his brows. Again the horn sounded. He trotted to his favourite hilltop, and, squatting upon his hams, peered into the valley below. A horseman appeared — another — then another — and more. Black dots moved among them — they were hounds ; more than he had ever seen before. Their tails, upright, waved among the grasstops ; they cast wide, working up and down the open and along all the edge of the distant swamp. A faint shout reached his ears — "*Hi-ii-i! Kimrie, hi! Hike! Trailer — on! Bright Eyes, there!*"



.. Legs sank his fangs deep into the nose of the harrying foe."

He saw the tan-faced man with the black beard laying on the hounds, and with a sudden start Legs remembered that his rabbit-hunting had led him at dawn along that selfsame swamp edge.

A hound gave tongue, a nervous, whimpering tone, yet eager and ready. At the voice, Legs saw a chocolate-spotted hound, full-shouldered and big, with lop ears and sloping shoulders, drive apart from the pack, and fare about alone. He saw this hound range out into the open, up the wind, and heard again the cry — “Hike! Kimrie!”

Again a hound gave tongue. “Hi — on, Trailer — hunt him out!” Kimrie, off at one side, loped along abreast, ready to burst away in front if the pack should find, and content to let the others work. But the scent was cold, and the trailing slow. Legs, from his hilltop, saw the pack overrun his morning track, and grinned. But elation was short-lived. The pack cast back, and higher up the wind. “*Ki-yeow!*” bayed the impatient puppies, falling upon the in-

definable scent. Farther out was Kimrie ranging, at work at last, but all on his own account. He pushed on. Below, Trailer was working out the knotted skein, the meandering of Legs in search of a dinner. "*Yow-yap!*" voiced the eager ones, then "*Kow—aaow-yi-yi—buh-ooo-oo-oooh—yi-yi-ki-iii-i!*" Kimrie had found, a breast-high scent hardly half an hour old.

The rest tolled in, all adding their voices to the turmoil. Legs from his hilltop saw the riders take in their fretting hunters, waiting for the last bunch to get away. Up the crest streamed the rabble of hounds, harked on by the man with the beard; and the woods gave back in babbling echoes the music of the pack as it went away at speed.

Legs concluded it was time to move. Whatever they were trailing might come along his way, and — Heavens, it was himself they were running! Over the crest of the hill came the chocolate-spotted hound, Kimrie, far in the lead. "*Ba-ow-ww-yi-yi!*" he yawped, as his eye fell upon Legs.

It was no time for pleasantries. Legs somersaulted over the edge of the bank, struck the gully bottom, and stretched himself. He fled along the hollow swifter than a turkey buzzard's shadow on a hillside, his ears flat back, and his hind feet ahead of his nose at every stride. No time now to double and twist in the sand. Slinking Kimrie had bounced him too close for that, or for any other tricks, yet a while. Life, now, was in his speed; he must stretch country between him and the babbling pack before he could try precious moments for a baffling side jump or for tangled tracks in the sand gullies. So he stretched away to the north.

Far away he halted, turned, and cocked up an ear. A faint echo of the pack sounded at the rear. His run up the gully sand had checked them a bit, but instinct told him that they had trailed him out anew, and even now were screaming in pursuit. His jaw wrinkled, showing all his fangs in contempt and hatred. But if he were to throw off this harrying crew, he must be at work.

He slipped down, then, into the nearest gully, and danced a minuet through the sun-baked sands, and at the end, with a tall leap, jumped the bank and departed.

From the heights he looked down. He saw the pack, strung out into three big bunches, stream up the slope and turn in, at full cry, through the gully gap. High-voiced Kimrie and his followers charged along, overran the scent, dropped their voicing to a whimper, circled, and fell all at fault. Legs sniffed disdainfully. He watched the worrying hounds cast about afresh, and presently the hunt came thundering toward the check. "Hike! — on, Kimrie — on, Trailer — hi-ii! — Bright Eyes — Jake!"

No use. Legs's plane geometry laid out upon the deadening sand had them all at fault. But presently he saw the pack drawn off, and cast again in a big circle. Its sphere drew perilously close to the watching coyote, and, after a moment's reflection, he trotted on. But once more a chocolate-spotted hound — the inevitable Kimrie — appeared before him.

The hound was ranging far; he had cut off the straight line that Legs had set toward the distant Sardis range, the straight line that every coyote takes when a hunt is on his trail, and Legs, to escape, was forced to circle wide. The move was almost fatal. The other hounds, drawing on, cut corners, and once he was nearly headed. No more circling after this, thought Legs, as he streaked away to the Whitney place, where there was sanctuary in a box across the railroad track. Gasping and blown, his heart burning in his breast like a live coal, he reached the box, leaped into its shelter, and had hardly turned when the hounds were baying fiercely at the opening.

They took up the hounds and went away. Legs's last view of them was the black-bearded man peering purple-faced through the door of his retreat. "Got off, eh? But what we'll do to you the next time, mind you, 'll be a plenty!" But Legs resolved that he'd have no such heart-burning again. He would see to that, he would.

A fortnight passed. Legs, undisturbed, took up life on the big hilly plain above the railroad. Once or twice they heard him singing down the moon, and made plans for the pack to bounce him out again. But with the change of the moon he turned back to the Harris country, where a dead cow lay in a gully and there were more rabbits in the runs. Here at last they found him again. From his coign of vantage he saw the hounds laid on; Kimrie, as usual, ranging up the wind. Disgraceful, he thought. Here he had just dined fitly upon the post-mortem cow, and was in no mood or condition to go streaking across the country. So he made a bolt for the nearest den-box, but, by ill chance, drew near it just as a bunch of stragglers came ripping up the gully. With his tail flying low, he turned and fled away, laying his chest to the ground, and fairly sobbing at every stride. Three miles of this, however, warmed him up; he ran more easily, and again, ahead of the chase, dashed into sanctuary, safe.

It was a good run — too good, in fact, for the health of Legs. Though he knew it not, he was a marked coyote. He made good sport, and that settled it. They ran him at every chance. Life became a continual torment. He went back to the Sardis country, was bounced anew, and streaking back toward the railroad, circled wide to reach the box. But Kimrie must have learned. When Legs galloped on in a big circle, Kimrie shot across on the chord, and blocked the runway to the box. There was nothing left for Legs but to stream off anew toward the Harris range. So back he went, and, half dead, made the box — his first home — just in the nick of time to save his hide from the leading bunch of hounds.

Then the dry weather set in, and Legs took heart again. The trailing was slow, and often the pack were at loss to work their noses on the brittle, dusty ground. So he sat on the hilltops watching, and his old contempt returned. Once he grew big with daring and showed himself. Wild with

excitement, the leaders burst into cry, but their speed was no match for his preliminary spurt. He lost them easily in the first big gully, and then sat down hard by while they puzzled and whimpered over the trail. Presently he went rabbit hunting, quite convinced that he was supreme.

The weather changed. The top soil freshened with dampness, and the old trails and tracts in the sand were washed to a level. Once more Legs heard the snarling of the horn, the shrill cries of the hunt, the dog music, and the thudding of hoofs as the riders came faring along. He arose and lunged sullenly to the hill-crest. The pack was streaming wide. He saw the old hounds working on ahead, the puppies babbling now and then at their heels. But Kimrie — where was Kimrie? Look there — up along the hill! See that sharp tail carried high, that quick form working through the grass. There was Kimrie, and the coyote bounced forth with the self-working hound almost upon him.

Away they went, short shift for Legs. Far

away — a good ten miles — was the Whitney place, for the pack was already between him and his old-time home, the box in the gully bank. It was afternoon. Legs had slept off his last heavy meal, and was lean and fresh. He leaped to the nearest gully, raced up the sand, and jumped the bank. But the top surface broke beneath his eager pads, leaving a damp, hot trail behind. Instinctively he knew it, and a fierce dread came into his heart. Stretching out into the open, he fled away, the whole pack bunched and close upon his heels. Away — away toward the Sardis ranges — to the deep gullies beyond — to the hard ground and the sheeplands where he might baffle pursuit. His perils oppressed him. He shot away, forgetting to save his strength. The crying voices hurried in his train, and there ahead — desperation! — a patch of heavy timber blocked him. He turned in full view. There was no other chance — his instinctive choice of open country forced him. The hounds, in full sight, cut corners. He strained his muscles, flying

at dizzy speed across pasture and heavy plough. Beyond was his sanctuary, but the pack was creeping up. Two centuries of blood and breeding against a pariah of countless starveling generations. The strain told. Over his shoulder he saw them coming, and in the rear the tan-faced man of the black beard urging onward a wide-gaited thoroughbred. Others plied at his heels. Terror was in the heart of Legs — Legs, the thief, pariah, alien. Oh, for a sanctuary! He swung circling toward the box beside the railroad, and — there was Kimrie backed up by the black hound Trailer. Wisely they had cut the corner; again he was headed off. There was no other way. He must lead the mad chase far away. But, perhaps — His memory recalled the haunts in Sardis many miles beyond. Speed now was his only hope. The climb to the hilltop was stiff, but it left the heavy hounds behind. He took fresh hope, but short-lived indeed. They were on him anew. No use. He must turn and fight, and against what odds!

He leaped into the nearest gully, looking for a niche to back down so that he might fight them off in front. He ran up and down, seeking. But the blank walls of sand faced him on every side. A bunch of hounds sailed into view, and headlong plunged into the gulch. Backing into a bush, his paws before him, Legs snapped snarling at the foremost.

"*Bow-ow-ow!*" roared a heavy bass of hound music. Legs stood there at bay, his dripping fangs shown in menace to the leaders. They fell back an instant, then over the bank raced Kimrie and at his flank was black Trailer. The couple leaped upon him. He set back, and one had him by the throat. Then the cloud of hounds flung themselves upon the fight. He struck right and left with his fangs, the teeth clicking as they met in flesh and fur. Trailer he bit through the face, and the hound snatched off, only to fall on far more savagely, and with a wide leap Kimrie launched himself on the coyote's back, silent and dreadful. Legs bit him in the

flank, but the hound gave no heed. He sunk his teeth to the coyote's spine, there was a sharp scrunch, and the pariah and thief was done. He fell back, his haunches trailing useless, and that was the end. Though he still bit and fought about, the crushing pack fell upon him. Once he howled.

Over the hill came the horsemen, thundering down the slope. Legs, in the midst of the baying hounds, was fighting — but weakly — to the last. With the last show of strength he turned upon a puppy, and bit it on the ear. Then the pack buried him under, and he struck no more.

Thus ends the story of Legs.



"Over the bank raced Kimrie. . . . Then the cloud of hounds flung themselves upon the fight."

CHAPTER IV.

TRAGEDY — THE STORY OF A MOOSE.

OVER there in the north by the edge of the upper Ottawa lies a chain of ponds lost in the heart of solitude. Murmuring sedges rim their turgid waters, and summer sheets them with a rank, sick greenery of matted lily pads. Around lies a waste of bush — on one side the swamps of the black Beauchene; on the other, a wide sweep of heavy timber choked with torn and broken windfalls. Here track the moose, crossing from shore to shore, gorging on the lush and spongy lily roots, or wallowing in the malodorous mud. Peace is theirs. Few journey in this wild, and there they grow — big moose, the bulls with antlers spreading an arm's breadth across.

Chabot — Chabot of the Algonquins — sat at his cabin door. Below, on the shore of

Bumb Creek, his canoe lay beached, still piled with his pack, an axe, and three rusty bear traps. He had just come down from the north—from the Beauchene—and his larrikins showed it. One was as full of holes as a rotten rabbit blanket, and the other dragged behind a disconsolate, flapping sole. As Chabot said explosively with an oath, the Beauchene was a place to send an enemy, but never to take a friend. "Moccasin dam gone!" he exclaimed, ruefully reflecting upon the condition of his footgear. In a bucket at his elbow stood a new pair, fresh from the H. B. store, soaking against the time when he should try them on. But presently his face lightened, and his air of slow dejection vanished like a cloud before the summer sun.

"See um moose," said he—this to Peter, heir of all the Chabots. "See um one, two, four moose—one big, dam bull!" Peter evinced a proper interest, but Chabot had halted, again studying the deplorable condition of his moccasins. From this he turned to an inspection of the larrikins soaking in

the bucket. Having turned the water out of them, he tried on the pair, thrusting his feet into their soggy depths. Then he arose, squashing the leather into shape with a grunt of satisfaction.

“How big dat moose?” demanded Peter, desiring accurate information.

“Um — dunno. Mebbe so big bimeby — dunno.” He spread his arms to denote the width of antlers, and Peter, in derision, grinned. But Chabot gave no heed to the doubting of his heir. “Big moose, dat. Mos’ big moose I ever saw.” He turned slowly toward the north, his fat, bland face staring into the direction of the distant Beauchene. “Bimeby I go call dat moose. Mattawa feller give me ’leven — twenty — forty dollar. I kill um dat moose. Dunno — go shoot um dat moose, sure ’nuff.”

Peter still sat, scratching his head in thought. A month before, by the judicious trading of certain mink and musquash skins and an otter pelt, he had become possessed of a gun. It was an archaic arm, a relic of

bygone days, and was calculated to slay all within its neighbourhood without discrimination in favour of its owner. But Peter, having tried it with disastrous effect on a neighbour's geese, was eager to use it on the moose, a quarry yet to fall before him.

"Bimeby," said Peter, thoughtfully, "bimeby I go kill um dat moose myself."

"Hunh!" exclaimed Chabot, with scorn and disgust. "Bimeby I take um club." He reached out, and with a brawny hand in Peter's hair, his oily, black, and tangled hair, lifted Peter to his feet.

"Sure," said Chabot, "sure you go up in Beauchene, sartin you get lost. Bimeby you run round holler. Bimeby you fall down. Den *muckwa*¹ come, and den Peter goo'-by. You try dat, sartin I take um club."

Peter frowned in recollection of that club. More than once he had felt it play a lively staccato upon his ribs — a sore memory that still stirred his imagination. But even so, he ached to go north into the Beauchene,

¹ Algonquin for bear.



"A cow, the summer's calf, and a spike-horn bull; behind them a lord of the swamps . . . swinging his antlered crest."

though he knew he should ache still more were his fond parent to find him straying upon any portage in that wild.

Summer waned. Over there in the north the nights grew crisp, and a growing, glittering moon stared down upon the solitude. At midday a murmuring host of flies still came forth, but in the chill night air they died. Then the moose took comfort. Here, now, along the last pond in the chain came a herd of four — a cow, the summer's calf, and a spike-horn bull; behind them, a lord of the swamps, a great bull, swinging his antlered crest lightly as if these heavy fronds were wisps of straw. His horns, though fully grown, were still in the velvet — broad, and spread widely with massive palms. Following at the heels of the cow, he swept his way through the brush, strong and valiant, a black giant, slouching and ponderous in his stride.

The sun dipped toward the hills, and already the night fog was lifting in the shadows of the trees. Stalking to the shore, the

herd plunged into the shallows, and rolled, wallowing deeply in the mud. Grunting with satisfaction they lay there, and the baffled flies, droning in disappointment, withdrew and left them in peace.

But short was their peace, indeed. The cow, rising to turn around, halted, and stood fixed there rigid in alarm. Across the pond the crack of a breaking twig sounded faintly in the listless air. With twitching ears she stared into the bush; again a twig crackled under the tread of a heavy foot, and at that instant a passing breeze shook the spires of the black spruce overhead. *Woof!* With a snort of fright the cow drove the calf to its feet, and rushed to the shore, at her heels the spike-horn crazy with fear. But the big bull, facing the alarm, still stood out in the pond, his head fixed on high, temerarious, yet prepared discreetly for an instant flight.

The bushes parted, and a man stepped forth, and following was a boy — Chabot and the heir-apparent Peter. Once more Chabot had come up into the Beauchene to find



“The cow . . . stood fixed there, rigid in alarm.”

where the moose were using, and as a signal favour, brought Peter with him too. Here they stood, now, and the bull stared, red-eyed and fixed with wild surprise. His gray-black mane pushed forward, jets of steam spumed from his wrinkling nostrils, and — *woof!* — he snorted loudly. Then a passing gust swept him the terrorizing taint. *Woof!* He lunged about, slow and awkward, snorted, and with a wild leap ploughed to the bank, breasted a windfall, and away went slashing through the forest.

“See um dat moose, now?” asked Chabot. “Dat big moose—mos’ big moose I ever saw.”

Peter stood transfixed, his mouth rounded, and his eyes great with eagerness. Then he gasped.

“Sartin dat big moose,” said he. “Bimeby I shoot um dat moose—hey?”

“Hunh!” exclaimed Chabot. “Bimeby I take um club!”

There was no answer to this logic. But within, Peter’s soul cried out in protest. For-

ever — asked Peter of himself — forever was he to be a mere hewer of camp-wood ; forever a common drudge ? No, cried out the inner voice ; and, following at his fond parent's heels, he took up the trail to camp.

Now came the frosts, touching the maple with a brush of fiery red. Overhead, the moon grew round and big, and flights of southbound fowl traded from pond to pond. Fall had come, and along the ranges the rut was under way. Peace no longer prevailed ; in the herd of four the spike-horn bull was appreciating the first sad fruits of existence. He noted with growing concern the bellicose attitude of the master-lord ; for, surly and jealous, the big bull mooned about the ridges grunting fiercely, or in the swamps beat his heavy antlers against the alder's trunks. Around his face hung the tattered velvet from his horns, now white and sharp about the points ; and sometimes he dashed frantically down the hollows, and as frantically returned. Again, he prodded the spike-horn brusquely in the ribs, and the

spike-horn wondered why. Uneasily the cow looked on. She watched these demonstrations, and bided her time. Then, one night, when the bull had gone charging down the slopes, she fled the opposite way, taking the calf, but leaving the bewildered spike-horn to settle his own affairs. Outraged at this desertion, he stood upon the hilltop, and felt resentment surging in his heart. Hark! There was the big bull coming back. The spike-horn's mane ruffled forward, and a red gleam shot from his eye. Rage possessed him. He spread his legs apart, squaring himself for the combat. *Oonh!* he grunted, and at the sound there was an answering roar from the oncoming lord. In masterful imitation, the spike-horn beat his clubs — still cloaked in velvet — upon the bushes. *Oonh!* he roared.

Crack — crash! The big bull tore through the brush, and with glowering eyes stood confronting his younger rival. But rage had seized the spike-horn, and he cast discretion to the winds. Roaring, he fell sud-

denly upon the big bull's flank, and jabbed him viciously with short and stubby horns. A bellow of rage and pain burst from the giant; he swung about, and, driving down upon the spike-horn, threw him heavily upon his haunches. Then he gored brutally while the vanquished young one struggled to his feet, and, turning tail, the spike-horn fled squealing down the ridges before his infuriated vanquisher.

Three days after this, still sore and aweary, the spike-horn lay in a swamp, where the black mud brought balm to his wounded ribs. Life was no longer what it had seemed in the first heyday of his youth, and solitude oppressed him. His heart grew fond with longing; he thought of a young, sleek, velvety cow he had seen days before wallowing in the upper ponds. Where was the charmer now? He heaved slowly to his feet, and slunk down to the open water. *Oonh!* he grunted softly.

What was that? From a neighbouring ridge came a dulcet tremolo, a soft answer



"Turning tail, the spike-horn fled squealing down the ridges before his infuriated vanquisher."



to his call. *E-ee-unh!* It arose whispering on the night air, a seductive chord; and with his eye aflame, the spike-horn charged across the shallows, and burst his way into the harbour beyond. There stood that self-same sleek and velvety cow, blandly cropping at the browse, and quite unaffected by his masterful presence. The spike-horn was non-plussed; he halted in his stride, and stared at the charmer. Then he grunted again, and at this his adored looked superciliously about. Somehow, he had created an effect, so, to push his suit, he fell to beating the bushes with his spikes, feeling strength and valour stirring in his breast, in his heart a deep love. Surely the brave deserve the fair; the spike-horn lifted his head and roared defiantly to the world. At first the world gave no answer, so the spike-horn roared again. *Oonh! Oonh!* Then more loudly — *roonh!* The echoes were still beating from the hills across the evening quiet, when an answering challenge came thundering down the flat — *Woonh!*

Woonh! — hoarse and vengeful, the voice of mastery.

Silence followed. The spike-horn stood with his mane ruffled in rage, his head lowered for the affray; again the heavy answer roared across the interval. He heard the brush crash beneath the other's tread; still again he roared, and out from the timber yonder strode the big bull. Wrath possessed the colossus. He beat his horns upon the trees till they clashed like steel striking upon steel, and at a clipping stride rushed to the combat. The spike-horn irresolutely paused. He beheld his ancient foe, and his spirit weakened. There stood the cow, looking on, and then, mischievously, as if to provoke the affray, she lowed softly — *oow! eunh!*

Enough; the spike-horn blared back with valiant purpose. He roared loudly, and the big bull, rushing the cover, fell upon him like an avalanche. Then fled the cow.

The conflict was short. Once more the lord of the swamps smashed down the weak-



“The spike-horn lifted his head and roared
defiantly to the world.”

ling's guard, jabbed him viciously, and with guttural bellows drove the usurper over the hilltop, and far from the scene of his wooing. So, sore and violent with impotent rage, the spike-horn again sought seclusion in a swamp, where for a week he lay in silence.

"Fine night," said Chabot; "sartin I go call um dat moose." Peter grinned. He sat on his hams intently silent, while the head of the house of Chabot stood before the fire rolling a square of birch-bark, now heating it in the flame, now bending it upon his knee. Presently, with a dexterous hand, he twisted it into shape—a moose horn with a superior tone, fit to draw from his haunts the wariest moose. Binding it with a thong of spruce root, Chabot trimmed the edges to his satisfaction, and then, with a solemn wink at Peter, lifted it to his lips. *Oow! eunh!* he grunted seductively—*eunh!*

"Sartin call um dat moose," said he.

Peter reached out and took the horn. Often in the family manse on Bumb Creek he had listened to his parent practising; often, when there was nothing else to amuse, Peter had tried a simulation of the cow's wooing call. With a sidewise look at his father, he breathed into the horn — grunted once appealingly — and then throatied the long call, the sonorous whine of the lovesick charmer of the wild. Chabot nodded.

"Not so bad. Sartin bimeby you call um moose. Dunno — mebbe."

Silence lay upon the forest. Treading softly, Chabot and the eager Peter linked through the bush toward the distant pond. Chabot led, bearing his rifle and the moose horn; Peter bearing only a frayed and dis-solute H. B. blanket, many seasons the worse for wear. "Why you bring um dat blanket?" Chabot demanded, keen with scorn. "Moose hunter — dam — take no blanket." Part of his philosophy was that to insure success one must suffer every dis-

comfort of wet and cold. "Bimeby moose come—no say nothing—dam blanket; can't shoot." But Peter had another reason for bearing this extra burden. In a hollow log beside the canoe he had stored his precious gun, and determination nerved him. He was bound to fling at least one bullet into the ribs of that lordly bull, and no threat of club could stay his purpose. But he was also aware that Chabot would never suffer him in the canoe along with this deadly arm. So the blanket was to serve a double purpose—to sit upon and to hide his destroying weapon. "Bimeby," he sniffed evasively, "bimeby catch um cold." And Chabot only grinned in derision.

They launched the canoe, and Chabot went off into the bush a piece, searching for the paddle. Peter, with a dexterous gesture, slipped his gun aboard, and hid it within the blanket.

"Don't say northin'," warned Chabot, "don't hit um canoe wit' paddle. Bimeby see moose."

Peter nodded, and they pushed from the shore.

In the quiet air arose a soft appealing murmur, a low, seductive cadence. It stole through the silent, austere forest, filling the world with a querulous echo. A gang of ducks, disturbed from the neighbouring sedge, arose with a heavy splash, and whisked away above the trees, clamouring at the disturber. Back from the hills beat the sound, and after it—silence. A half-hour passed; the sun had dropped below the distant hills, and a light vapour eddied about the chill surface of the pond. Again the moose-horn tried the distant covers—louder and more appealing. No answer.

“Sartin dat moose long way off,” exclaimed Chabot.

“Dunno,” answered Peter, in dejection; “mebbe he got um cow a’ready.”

Long shadows stole across the pond, and the moon overhead, fleecy, first, in the light of the dying sun, gave forth a radiant gleam. Darkness came. Once more Chabot tried

the horn. *E-unh! E-ee-oo-ooo-oonh!* A long, wailing bellow, agonizing and full of lovelorn sorrow—loneliness, a cry of solitude.

A quick movement of the two set the canoe rocking upon the placid pond. What was *that!* They listened, their nostrils spread, their breath whistling in the stillness. *Oonh!* Then — *Runh!*

“Over there!” hissed Chabot in a whisper. He pointed to a neighbouring hill, his eyes glittering with satisfaction.

“No — not over there!” cried Peter. “Hunh — listen; over here!”

They hearkened again. “By gar!” exclaimed Chabot, “hear um two moose; bimeby fight, mebbe.”

The spike-horn bull stood in a cedar swamp, his feet spread apart and his head hanging low. All day he had been running up and down the ridges, and now that night was come he paused to listen. Perhaps in this quiet he would hear the voice of his charmer — perhaps; but he had scant hope.

A near-by owl screamed, and he started, nervous at every unwonted sound. But then silence fell again upon the forest, and only his heavy breathing disturbed the quiet air. *Unh!* what was that? He heard a soft appealing murmur—a low, seductive cadence—steal through the whispering night. With beating heart he listened, and the echo died away. Silence again. Cautiously he moved in the direction of the sound. Once again, as he plied through the darkening forest aisles, he heard the call go up; then again—loudly and distinct. *Unh!* he grunted—*unh—oonh!*

Across the hills came another sound, a fiercer, deeper answer to the horn—*woonh—runh!* But the spike-horn, ploughing through the bush, for a while heard nothing but the dulcet obbligato, the soft appeal, the birch horn simulating the cry of love. The big bull, swaggering and self-conscious, was bound for the wooing too. At his heels trotted the sleek and velvet cow, vainly trying to draw him from her rival.

But the big bull, arrogant in his might, was disposed to pay double court; at any rate, to look upon the charms of this other cow. *Aarnh!* whined his doleful mate — *aarnh!* But he still made on. Again she whined, crying like a whimpering hound, when the bull halted and looked back. Should he go or not? Truly he that hesitates is lost. Once more the tones of the horn floated over the interval, and with a loud answer he pressed forward, ignoring the appeals to return.

On the hilltop overlooking the pond paused the spike-horn bull. *Oonh! Oonh!* he grunted. The effect was magical. Below from the pond came a soft, insinuating answer; from the opposite hill, a loud, roaring challenge. Eagerness fled from the heart of the spike-horn; it was his enemy's voice. He stood there, wild with rage, yet prudently prepared for flight. Once more the horn sounded, and the big bull gave the answer, ending with another challenge roar. No, the spike-horn had learned a lesson of

discretion, and at heavy cost. He would not answer the challenge, but still he would steal down to the pond for at least one look at his charmer. So softly, gliding like a shadow, he stepped down the ridge, silently, with no more noise than a hunting mink would make. In this way he reached the soft ground below, and was just turning toward the pond, when a light air wheeled across the flat. *Whoo!* What was that? His nose stretched forth, wrinkling, and tried the passing breeze. *Whoo!* One gulp of the tainted air turned him right about, and he fled, stealing away terrified.

On came the big bull unwarned. He reached the low ground, and stood there, beating his horns upon the trees. Again he grunted, again and again. Slosh—slosh—slosh! He heard the fair one treading along the shadows, so he thought; but it was Chabot threshing the water with a paddle. *Ow-eunh!* called Chabot.

A sudden crash broke from the bush. "Coming," hissed Chabot. Peter, with a

convulsive movement, dragged forth the gun beneath him. He stretched it out over the bow of the canoe, and with thumping heart waited, his finger on the trigger. Again — another crash. Out into the shallows rushed a black hulk—a moose! It stood for an instant revealed in the moonlight, and Chabot, dropping his gun, cursed aloud. It was the cow; she had rushed in to drive away her rival. There she stood, looking everywhere, grunting in her rage.

“Dam!” said Chabot. “See um dat dam —”

A ripping detonation cut him short; from the bow of the canoe shot forth a streak of flame, lighting the black shadows under the leaning trees. Night roared with a thousand echoes, and the choking fumes of powder hung heavy upon the air. There for an instant stood the cow in silence, but only for an instant. A hoarse bellow of fear burst from her; she turned about, and galloped madly for cover. Crash —

crash—crash—away she went, and before her fled the bull.

“What for you shoot um dat cow?” cried the wrathful voice of Chabot. “By gar, you miss um, too. Sartin—by gar—sartin I take um—dam—”

High into the night arose the swift staccato of a thumping club and the loud yells of Peter, heir of all the Chabots.

Once frightened, a moose goes far. For three days Chabot tracked the forest, circling widely, before he found again where the big moose was ranging with his cow. Meanwhile, Peter was marooned in camp, his back and ribs still a sore reminder of that dramatic night. Beyond the last of the Beauchene ponds Chabot at last ran upon the quarry's track—a deep-beaten runway where the moose came down to the water in the night. An open barren lay around the pond—a dark pug-hole fathoms deep with mud. Chabot looked about. He picked up the trail, and followed, marking the way toward the timber. Deviously it

led along the barren's edge, and at last turned toward a neighbouring ridge. Under foot the dried leaves lay deep, noisy, and alarming, and for fear of starting the game again, Chabot dared go no farther. But he made sure before returning that it was the big bull, or, at any rate, one quite as large; for where the moose passed between two trees at least an arm's breadth across, his horns had chipped the bark on both.

"Sartin dat big moose," Chabot reflected; "sartin dat same bull."

Peter still sat by the fire, cleaning his beloved gun, when a cracking twig gave warning. Thrusting the rifle into the bushes, he settled into a dejected attitude, and gave no answer to Chabot's surly "Hunh!" But presently Peter noted that his father's sullen reserve was melting like spring snow on a southern hillside.

"See um dat moose?" asked Peter, tentatively.

Chabot turned round. "No see um moose — find track."

Delight spread upon Peter's solemn face. "You find um, hey? *Moom*—good! Bimeby I go—"

Chabot's hand reached for the kettle-prop—a long and supple staff of ash—and his fingers closed upon it. "Hoh!" he cried, and Peter said no more.

"Bimeby *I* go call um dat moose," Chabot announced; "bimeby *I* go kill um."

He settled himself before the fire, and with his skinning-knife fell to trimming the edges of his moose horn. Peter debated. What course should he pursue? Over yonder was the big bull, and he had never killed a moose. Forever should he be a hewer of camp-wood; forever a common drudge?

"Where you see um dat moose?" he asked, his keen eyes belying the innocence of his voice, and Chabot fell a victim to the duplicity of his son and heir.

"No see um moose—find um by big barren—hunh!"

Peter arose and sauntered into the bush.

Once out of sight, he took to his heels, and ten minutes later was stripping a square of bark from a birch, and twisting it horn-shape, whistling gayly as he worked. This finished, he slouched back to the fire.

"Peter, you sit by fire; I go call um moose." Chabot arose, gun in hand. "Fine night, sure 'nuff; hear um moose — bimeby see um."

He strode off up the trail, and Peter leaped to his feet. He waited till the retreating footsteps died away; then kicked out the fire and snatched up his gun and horn. With one last look around, he sped away in pursuit, and silence once more resumed her own.

Up and down the ranges ran the spike-horn, still looking for his cow. From the lower Beauchene, eastward into the edge of the big barren, his chase led on. He raced along the ridges, grunting now and then, or in the swamps halted, pawing pot-holes in the black mire and beating the alders with his horns. A frenzy possessed

him, for the rutting rage had filled him anew with valour. What was the big bull to him, or any foe before him? *Runh!* he grunted hoarsely, and, almost as if in echo, the droning call of a wooing cow sounded across the barren. A moment's silence, then he roared the answer.

On a neighbouring ridge lay the big bull and his cow. He, too, heard the call and pricked his ears. *Unh!* he grunted softly, and the cow, lying in a neighbouring thicket, lifted to her feet. There she stood, listening, her ears wagging like a semaphore, and a sullen light in her eye. In truth, the course of true love to her had proved a rough, uneven path, an experience hardly to be desired. Before her lord she had been driven from range to range — knocked about in the bull's moments of frenzied displeasure — goaded, gored, and harried along the runways. Now she awaited only the opportunity to flee his presence; and once more the call of another charmer sounded in his ears.

Runh! Runh! The big bull swept his horns from side to side, beating the bushes in his way. With a long stride he marched down toward the barren, the cow close at his heels. She was silent now — on the watch, waiting. She followed till they reached the edge of the cover, and there the bull raised his voice again — *wunh! runh!* Across the barren came an answer — *unh! oonh!* — the challenge of the spike-horn. Then silence.

A light air sighed among the trees. It swept over the bull and his cow, eddied a moment among the tops, and then blew straight across the opening. *Whoo!* The spike-horn sniffed the breeze, tainted with the blended scent of man and moose. *Whoo!* he sniffed, and was silent. Softly he crept along the forest edge, cautiously trying the air. But once more the breeze had died away, and the scent was gone. Now came again the horn's low voice, stirring the echoes on the hill. Hoarsely the big bull answered, and, forgetting all, the spike-horn roared the challenge back.

Far down the barren arose the cry of another cow. Dismally soft, it wavered over the sleeping forest and murmured to the skies, rising and falling in waves of sorrowful sound. Chabot, hidden in the brush out there upon the barren, heard, and raised his head to look.

"Hunh! Dam cow call um away."

A dense silence fell upon the forest world; on one side stood the big bull listening, on the other the spike-horn raptly intent. Then, breaking from the cover, the spike-horn raced down the open barren, grunting as he sped along. *Runh!* roared the big bull, following. In vain Chabot yodled upon his horn. Once he stopped the pair, but a soft grunt from the other charmer down below tolled them along anew.

"Hunh!" exclaimed Chabot, suddenly and with attentive ear. "Hunh! What dat?" He listened anew to the other call, heard it come floating out of the distance, throaty and alluring, and with a savage curse struck his hand upon his knee.

"Who call um dat moose?" he cried aloud.

It was Peter — the graceless Peter — gone moose-hunting on his own account. Chabot swore again.

The spike-horn bull halted with a crash of breaking wood. *Whoo!* The air was rank with the scent of man. *Whoo!* he snuffed aloud, and the big bull heard him snorting. But before he could turn to flee — *aarn! aarn! e-unh!* — came the whine of a moose-calf. Peter, indeed, was trying all his arts. Again the big bull roared, and though the spike-horn had detected the cheat of the horn, he stood there, awaiting the climax.

Oonh! Oonh! he grunted, and at the challenge, out rushed the big bull, crashing down the thickets, and like a whirlwind tearing into the open. *Oonh! Woonh!* he bellowed — and a crash like a clap of thunder broke from the bush before him.

Hill spoke to hill in the trail of the ripping report. Over the barren floated a

cloud of white and fleecy smoke, and the air was rancid with its odour. Cling-bang! Again the night shocked with the thunder-burst, and with one wild plunge the big bull swayed, gasped with a deep-drawn breath, and fell to his knees. His head, crowned with massive horns, shook from side to side; his breath whistled in a deep-drawn sigh. Clip-bang! His head fell forward, he heaved once with a violent shudder, and fell, rolling upon his side.

Out of the thicket raced a form — wild-eyed, with a white and drawn face. With demoniac yells of joy it raced up to the flank of the dying quarry, and screamed anew. It was Peter, and around his head he waved a smoking gun, ruined forever now, and with its fore end shattered from the barrel. “Whoop!” he yelled, and at that juncture a stout hand reached out in the darkness and seized him by the hair. With an agile wrench Peter tore himself free.

“Sartin I kill um dat bull!” he yelled. “Look — you see um dead!”

Chabot looked, and his mouth opened wide. There lay the bull, a colossus, whose head was crowned with antlers an arm's breadth across. "By gar!" he exclaimed, "sartin you kill um big moose."

Beyond, among the ridges, a pair of moose swept along the runways. One was a sleek and velvety cow, the other a spike-horn bull.

CHAPTER V.

THE SURVIVORS — A STORY OF THE LAST BISON HERD.

THEY were years of a ruthless sacrifice when the bison went their way. Over the dust-blown prairie, stirred by the feet of fleeing herds, the uproar of the killing thundered. Brown hulks of the dead and dying dotted every plain; destruction loomed in the trails; the slaughter grew. Spurred by incessant fear, bunch after bunch fled from the main body, and edged northward through the gulfs of the wooded wilderness. There their nature changed. They crept to the thickets, not less crafty than the blacktail and the herding elk — stampeding at every unwonted sound. Some, by terror-stricken marches, reached deeper into the heart of the wild, and of these two bands survived. One pushed northward — northward into

that limitless expanse of eternal cold that lies under the rim of the Arctic Circle. They faced their fronts to the icy, killing blasts, and in that blank solitude sought respite from the destroyer. The other, no less determined and alert, dipped down into a basin set among the peaks of the Yellowstone. Over them, like a benediction, hovered the dead silence of a desert world, and for a while they gorged in peace upon the bunch grass, and fell anew into a stupor of fat content. But again the destroyer followed; the heights volleyed with the rifle's roar, and a myriad ill-omened birds answered, screaming to the cry of the killer. Then—at the end—the law stepped in.

It is written now that the bison of the Park are the nation's wards—to be kept inviolate, guarded like a last heir in a court of chancery. Eternal vigilance is the price that is paid for their peace, and to save them against the greed of the waylaying poacher the patrols of the government push to and fro across these forest ranges. Of these men

a few come to know all about the buffalo — where they feed and when, and what things are doing in the herd; and some there are who can even follow them by night. Under the darkest sky they ride afar, watching the raiding pot-hunter from across the Wyoming and Idaho lines — the reckless scoundrels that kill for head and hide; and neither fear nor any fatigue turns them from the trail.

Markovitch was one — Markovitch, a private of the troop. He came West with a city draft, drawn obviously from the unwashed army of the unemployed, and never changed while he went from post to post. Famine was written gauntly upon his face, and he confessed, with unassuming frankness, that it was hunger and not the martial spirit, nor yet again the insinuating English of a recruiting dodger, that had first plunged him into a military life. He was a mixed Muscovite of some sort or other, speaking with the thick singsong guttural that comes from a use of tongues like the Yiddish; and he was the first of his kind that had ever

come West in a draft. Further, he was scant in stature, slow-moving, and perhaps a little stupid. But the first day he was turned loose on the Park ranges he showed that he knew the work.

"Eye-igh!" he cried in wonder, "var from comes the auerochs?"

A bunch of buffalo had just pitched over the edge of a slope, and with rolling shoulders, heavy-gaited and slow, came slouching down the open. "Eye-igh—dar I see him—the auerochs!"

Slim Logan, the trooper who rode at his knee, eyed him with airy scorn. "Orrocks—hell! You mean them?" He pointed toward the herd now spreading along the interval. "Guess there ain't any circuses where you hail from, Dutch. Them's buffalo. Orrocks—my eye!"

But the officer who rode ahead overheard and halted. "Aurochs—what d'you know about aurochs, Markovitch?"

The emancipated Muscovite blushed and squared himself to attention. "Yeaas—I

know him. Chu vant to know how? Den mine mooter she var a woman of Lithov, that var Lithuanie in Rooshia. Dar is vere the auerochs bin. I have seen him many dimes; in the forest I have watched him at his feed. They are the buffalo the same — no?"

The lieutenant nodded, asking casually: "Your father — was he a keeper of the herd?"

A faint flush burned upon the prominences of the trooper's cheeks, and his eyes wandered uneasily away. "Mine vatter — no. He var of Yaroslav." His hand at this uplifted with a little gesture, half deprecatory and half in pride. "Mine vatter he var of the army — an officer. Mine mooter she var a dowter only of a *borzatnik* — a *borzatnik*, a hunter — and he var an officer of the army."

At the air of astonishment in the officer's eye Markovitch's colour deepened. "And is he still in the army?" asked the lieutenant, curiously. Markovitch shook his head.

"I should not know," he answered, his words slow and halting, and his gaze fixed in a dull scrutiny of the distant herd. "I have not ever seen him. He var gone before I var borned."

The last of the band had streamed into view, and were grazing slowly toward an opening in the hills. At the edge of the timber the herd bull turned and roared across the interval. His mane and fringes were grimy from the wallow, and the hair had torn in patches, raggedly, from his flanks and back. Sturdy, big, and masterful, he faced them, and again he roared, a deep-throated bellow that rang among the silences.

"Mine vatter he var from the army," explained Markovitch, "and he vent away."

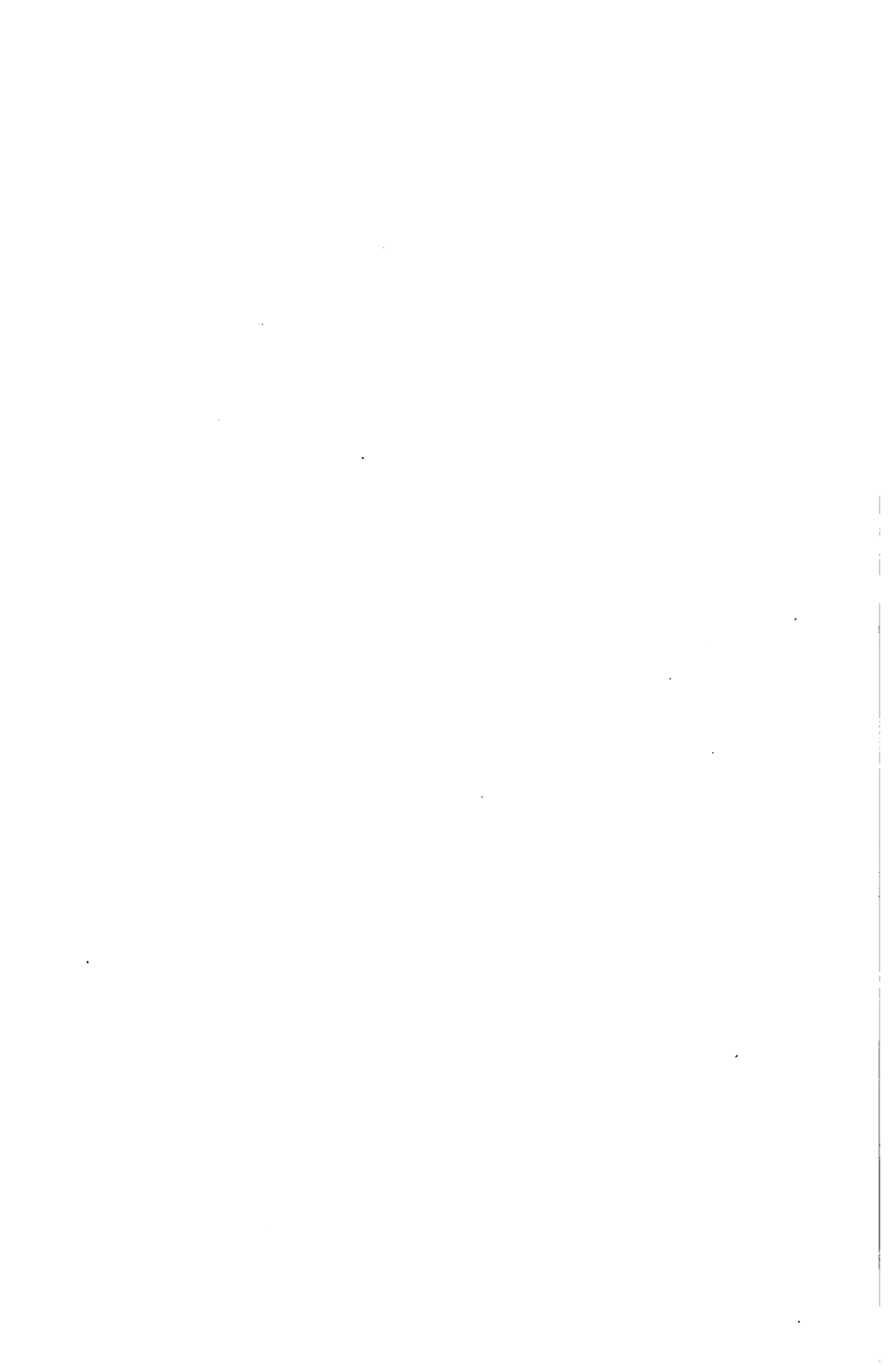
But the officer understood the drear story that lay beneath the apologetic words, and silently rode on. So, too, understood Slim Logan, who rode at the other's knee. He gleamed at him from the corner of his eye, his mouth fixed in a mocking smile. "Say, Dutch—he var from the army, eye-igh?"

he mimicked, and Markovitch slowly nodded. Logan laughed under his breath at this candour, and curled his lip anew into a sneer that bristled one end of his stubby mustache. In primeval days man showed his fangs as the wolf and the dog do even to-day. Slim Logan, now, was showing his teeth. He drew his horse away and rode alone. But Markovitch gave no heed. His mind, at the sight of these buffalo, first cousins to the aurochs of Lithuania, was occupied with other thoughts—the memory of days long in the dead past. So Logan, scoffing, eyed him unnoticed, and, once back at the post, set his tongue to work. Here was fair game, indeed, for that active member of the detachment. “A foreigner—a damned scattermouch,” thought Logan, “and like enough a ‘sheeny’ too.” Almost anything weak and unprotected was game for Slim Logan’s sport.

“Oh, my eye!” he laughed, laying out his gossip; “and if he didn’t lay claim his peggy dad was a straps—an officer gent. The



“The last of the band . . . were grazing slowly toward an opening in the hills. At the edge of the timber the head bull turned and roared across the interval.”



catch-colt!" He spat contemptuously, and uplifted his voice. "Hey, you — oh, Dutch! I say, Peddler! Come here and tell us about yer distinguished payrent — Brigadier Gen'r'l Markovitch what was. I hear tell he's the real thing."

Markovitch stood up, his bland, homely face staring upon them in round good nature. "Yeaas — he var of the army an officer. But he var not a brigadier, no. He var —" Here he hesitated, open-mouthed, pained and startled at the ripple of gibing laughter that ran around the circle.

"He var from the army — eye-igh?" mimicked Logan again, and had just launched into a fresh gibe when Mulligan, the troop sergeant, touched him upon the shoulder.

"Enough of that, Logan — let the man alone."

Logan's answer was brief, but, to his mind, strictly to the point. "Oh, devil take the Jew — he's fair game."

But there seemed some other sport for men more fitting than this baiting of a mild

and unoffending creature, and the sergeant looked Logan squarely in the eye.

"I misdoubt, Slim Logan," he slowly drawled, "that he's a Jew at all, and mayhap he's as white or whiter'n you. D'ye hear?"

Slim Logan threw up his head, his brows knit into a black frown. "It's your chevrons lets you say such things, Sergeant!" he sneered.

"The chevrons — ey? I stand ready to take off my coat any time you say, Logan, outside."

But Logan only looked away, and there, for the time, the incident closed. And Logan, to be sure, gibed Markovitch no more — at least while the sergeant was about.

Out in the Park a countless horde of wild things wandered, and the days were a dream of delight to Markovitch. Sometimes, though, he was set to guard the geyser basins, and this he did not like. The weird, ungodly manifestations of the under world filled him with a dark awe —

the spuming of the pits, the dull rumbling of the tortured ground, and all the other sounds and sights of that inferno. Given his own choice, he would have kept from the place forever, avoiding the sinks as the Shawnee and Blackfeet did in the days long ago. It was not only this superstitious awe, but the work of the place, that disgusted him. But he did this duty solemnly—in fact, as he did all his other work—chevying the imbecile tourists that tried to write their names on the geyser rocks or strove to stir up the pits with soft soap. Much better to stretch far out there under the peaks—to watch the deer trailing among the glades, the bison in the parks, and the long bands of elk that streamed across the passes. So after a while he was set to riding the ranges, the long patrols that reach from Mt. Everts to the southern heights, from Absarokas to the western line. And that, indeed, was the thing to do, thought Markovitch, riding on his way.

Through all the parks and the open tim-

ber ranged the buffalo, and Markovitch ranged with them. Sometimes he followed the bands when they moved, and sometimes he lay among the trees, idling like his heavy charges. He marked the bison bulls at their play and in their battles royal, lying so still upon the grass that the wood mice crept across his feet, and the rock coneys came out to whistle at his elbow. There was one big bull—a mammoth, a relic of a bygone host—that filled him with wonder and admiration. The great creature's front was draped with a thick and matted shield of hair, brown and curling upon the down-hanging head, and long, ochred, and streaming about its shoulders. Masterful was this overlord among the herds. In the spring, when the battling rage broke forth, it drove to and fro among the bands, sweeping victory before it. Markovitch wondered at its vigour, the vitality that kept it potent through all its many shocks of war; and when the monarch and the following herd drifted too near the passes where the

poachers cross, he spent many hot and laborious hours rounding up the bull and the cows and the calves, driving them into the safer central ground. Whole weeks passed in the joy of herding his colossal charges, until summer sped away and blind squalls of snow swept about the mountain peaks and came drifting across the lowlands. Then, as the drifts deepened, he took to *skis*, and on the long runners plied from post to post—from Soda Butte through all the miles of woodland, open and hilly ground, far away to the last reaches of Snake River. In this expanse of solitude he gloried, though the same loneliness, the same bleak and oppressive lands of silence, sometimes drove other men to madness. On his lonely marches he moved silently, for all like any other creature of this wild, seeing the buffalo as they pawed the snow for the frozen bunch-grass underneath, travelling with the elk, and finding where the silver-tip and the cinnamon had hived in their dens for the winter.

"The damn, slinkin' coyote," observed Slim Logan, with his usual spleen. "I'll bet a hard-tack agin a month's pay he ain't up to any good. Say, I see him to-day, 'way out there, snoopin' round like any of your mean, no 'count, sneakin' wood cats."

"Oh, you did, Slim, did you?" said Mulligan. "And what was you up to, yourself, out there?"

Slim, for an instant, seemed baffled, and he looked away with uneasy eyes.

"Oh—meanin' me? Why, I was just workin' patrol, to be sure—only just skid-din' along when I see him. He was—"

"That was a long way off your beat, Slim," cut in the sergeant. "And may I make bold to ask what you were doing so far off your line?"

Logan's explanation was clear, but not quite satisfactory. "Oh, I was just a-follerin' to see where a bunch of buffaloes went—yes, there was six cows, a calf, and the old bull—the big one, you mind? I see him—the Dutchman—snoopin' round,

too, so I quit. He ain't no good, that Dutchman, says I."

"You say too much, you do," snapped the sergeant, tartly, but Logan seemed too busy at something to give answer.

What Markovitch was doing was for the good of the government and its charges. On his lonely way from over beyond the winter post at Hayden Valley, he had found strange *ski* tracks in the newly fallen snow. Strange tracks in that country meant no good to the game, and Markovitch walked on, watching. The tracks led across the low ground, turned, and stretched into the hills. Two men were running on the snow, and before long he found where a third, coming in from the post, had joined them. He followed along, going cautiously, but after an hour's stalk a snow-squall burst from the hills, and with a downfall of heavy flakes obliterated the trail.

Again, the day following, he was out, sweeping in a wide circle about the outlying ground. Then, from far over among

the open parks, he heard the crack of a gun, a second shot — then a fusillade. Guns in the Park are tabooed, and a gun-shot means only that there is lawlessness afoot. Re-binding the *ski* thongs about his feet, Markovitch skimmed with all his speed along the slopes, making for the place. Down one ridge and across another he loped, and had just pushed out into the open when a loud shout hailed him, "Hey, you — oh, Dutch!"

Slim Logan was driving across the snow, waving wildly toward the hill crest at his left. Markovitch, halting, saw him draw his army Colt's and fire four times, yelling at every shot. "There they go!" cried Logan, and with that he beckoned Markovitch to follow. But when they reached the summit, only a blank stretch of untrodden snow lay before them. "Come along!" still cried Logan, swinging further to the left. Markovitch protested; that way led directly off from the place where he had heard the shots. But Slim Logan pushed forward, a spurt of smoky snow

rising from the trailing *ski*-pole as he plunged, racing down the declivity. For ten minutes he held on his way, then halted and wiped his brow.

"Gee—I guess we lost 'em," he grunted.

"Yeaas," answered Markovitch, "dey var gone."

Despite Logan's protests, he turned back upon the trail, and went off in a new line, Logan quitting him at the turn. So for an hour Markovitch plodded on, and then again he found the tracks upon the snow. There were three—all fresh—two coming in together and joining the third. He saw from the marks that they had stood about for a while; then the third man had left them and turned back over his own trail. Markovitch followed the two, and a half-mile beyond found where a bunch of buffalo had stamped out of the timber. The sheeted surface was torn high in furrows where in their frantic efforts they had driven through the drifts, and then he found a blur of blood and an empty shell,

cocked up endwise in the snow. The tracks went on, and there, in the edge of the timber farther along, stood a bison cow, her head hanging between her knees, and with just enough vigour left to totter from his path. The effort was her last; sighing deeply, she plunged forward, heaved over on her flank, and died. And there, too, in the thicket was a dead yearling bull already growing stiff, and another bloody trail that told that still a third had been maimed, to crawl off and die, perhaps, a lingering death in some lost thicket of the hills. It was too late now to follow; the poachers had fled, and he turned back toward the post in the dusk of the dying day. Logan was there before him, waiting, watching craftily. "Didn't find 'em?" he asked casually, and then, "I sure thought you couldn't catch 'em."

The sergeant listened closely to Markovitch's report. "And Logan went off the other way. He did—did he? Now that's rather currus, ain't it?"

"He dink he see him," explained Markovitch, but Mulligan seemed dissatisfied.

"Now, see here," said he to Logan, "what d' *you* know of this business?"

They had stepped outside, and in the dark the sergeant could not see the look on Logan's face.

"Me? And what should I know more'n's been told?" cried the trooper, as Mulligan strove to see his face in the darkness. "Has that scattermouch been lyin' agin me?"

"There's been no lyin' laid agin you, Logan. My advice is to mind your words. You've a bad record here,"—he added this with brutal frankness,— "what with card-playing, hard drink, and other things. Do I need to tell more?"

The sergeant went on, and without answer Logan stepped inside. His teeth were clenched, and wild anger burned redly upon his face.

"You Dutchman!" he shrilled. He ripped out an unspeakable oath, and con-

fronted Markovitch. "You will go blab on me — hey — you with your lyin' tongue? Take that!" He struck the other a violent blow in the face, and followed with a kick as Markovitch tumbled backward.

Uproar followed. Markovitch, a bloody cut across his mouth, struggled to his feet, stupefied with astonishment and pain. "Vat — vat var you —" he began, when, violently as before, Slim Logan aimed a second blow at his head. Markovitch, warding him off, swayed to and fro with half-spoken questions baffling on his lips. "I'll learn ye!" roared Logan, and with that threw himself upon his victim.

A sudden change — a pallor, a quick twitching of the mouth and eyes — overcame the little trooper. With an abrupt, forceful gesture he gripped Logan by the throat, and with his breath whistling between his clenched teeth, shook him as a terrier worries a rat. He grunted once with exertion — "Ugh-rr-r!" — and Slim Logan's heels beat upon the floor like

flails. Vainly he fought for breath, to escape the killing clutch upon his throat, but Markovitch still held on. The others then flung themselves upon him, one throttling the man with an elbow crooked about his neck. Yet still he clung to Logan's throat, until, with a stifled cry, he was torn loose, and thrown backward upon the floor. Once he strove to rise, and a private threw himself upon his chest. "Ugh-rr-r!" he grunted, his limbs stiffened rigidly, and with a sudden shocking of the muscles he was still.

Logan, still gasping, sat up and felt his throat. "Let me kill him!" he whispered, crawling toward the prostrate man. But the trooper sitting on Markovitch's chest leaped up with a startled cry. "Good God—the man's dead!" Silence followed, the man staring about, white with fear for the consequence. But Markovitch was still alive. He breathed once, stertorously, and his eyelids fluttered like the wings of a wounded bird. "No; he's alive. He ain't dead," cried the trooper. Then with deep

conviction: "But it's a devilish wonder some of us ain't. It's a sort of a fit. I've seen 'em afore—they just go blind sick with their rage, and topple over. Look out when he comes to—there!"

Markovitch opened his eyes, sat up, and weakly lifted a hand to his mouth. He stared at the smear of blood upon his fingers, gazed at it curiously, and looked about. "Vat—I fall down?" he exclaimed. He stammered again, questioning, half incoherent with his jargon of English mixed with meaningless Yiddish. "Vat—I fall down?" It was plain that the whole affray had been blotted from his mind, and Logan looked on, cursing with his rage and in wonder.

"You damn near killed him—him there—Logan," exclaimed a trooper, nodding toward the cause of it all.

"Vat—I hit him? Oh—now I don't forget," gasped Markovitch. "I dink mine head go around, and I—yes—no—I var forget all. Vat var him—I cannot dink. I am sorry." He held out his hand, offer-

ing it in peace, and Logan, with another burst of profanity, turned his back and shuffled from the room.

"Served him bully good and right," a trooper vowed; but Markovitch shook his head, doubtfully, trying to remember what had occurred. That was the last of Slim Logan's nagging, though, and before long Markovitch realized that he was left severely in peace.

Spring awakened the Park, and the hills shook their shoulders from the mantle of snow. Markovitch, on a sleepy-eyed roan, big and with the wide-gaited shambling shuffle of a moose, rode down the Yellowstone on an errand bent. He bestrode his Rosinante gayly, with his head thrown back, and with a bunch of blossoms held out straight before him. At sunset he returned homeward over the same trail, but no longer bore his flowers. Again, a week later, he crossed the ford, and again returned at night. The next day he was back, riding out on the ranges, where in

an outlying park he hobbled the roan, stretched out on the grass, and lay staring dreamily at the sky.

A half-mile below grazed the bison herd. The big bull, bigger and more surly than ever, lurched up and down the open, tossing his heavy front and hooking the cows in boorish gallantry. The winter coat hung in ragged folds from his flanks and back, and the red gleam of conquest was in his eye. Once he challenged the hills with a raucous bellow, a clamorous call that beat back in trumpet echoes from the slopes. Markovitch sat up, looking idly toward him. "Eye-igh! It var the spring," he murmured abstractedly. A younger bull tolled in toward the cows, advancing with a halting, hesitating stride; and the colossus, snorting the earth, faced the intruder, pawing the ground till the sods flew in volleys about his ragged sides. Again he roared; his head swung sideways, and at a plunging gallop he charged. Away went the younger bull, turning tail,

and with thudding hoofs scampering to the forest's edge. Markovitch grinned, while the big bull, rounding up his cows, drove them from the place of this disturbing gal-lant.

Once more down the river rode the little trooper, his face stretched into a wide grin, and a bunch of flowers resting on the pommel of his McClellan tree. An hour later Slim Logan, riding by, saw the roan hitched to a fence paling, and with a mocking grin got off and went in. "It's a fine day, Miss McGinn," he observed pleasantly; "and what the devil is that Dutchman doin' here?"

Miss Dealie McGinn, with that ready wit which will always be remembered in the Park, arose smartly to the occasion. "And if you please, Mr. Slim Logan," she inquired, "of what business of yours is it to ask, I make bold to say?" During this she halted in the intricate processes of pie-making, and fixed him with a disapproving eye. "Your langwidge is not fit for a

lady's ears, Slim Logan, and will you be pleased to step out the way you came in?"

Slim Logan leaned against the doorpost, curling his lip and grinning impudently. "Oh—it's that way, is it?" he mocked, and, after another leer, walked out, whistling in derision. Markovitch sat by, blandly smiling, for the subtle inflection of Logan's phrase conveyed nothing at all to his mind. But Dealie McGinn knew the ways and disposition of Trooper Logan, and was of a mind to keep clear of his company. Her anger now was apparent, and Markovitch looked into her face perplexed. She was not fair to look upon, perhaps, but the little trooper saw nothing of this. She was to him much more than all the other natural wonders of the Park, and she filled him with an awe as intense, almost, though of a different sort. The sun had touched her face with a ruddy glow that the blazing stove had done its best to heighten; her hair was of that raw yellow of bunch grass that has grown too

long in the sun, and guileless good humour shone often in her eyes. Markovitch's mind had turned back to Lithuania—to a girl of his people, one with such a face, but deeper, sadder eyes. It had been first misery, then want, and after that famine that shone in the eyes of that girl of the people, and —

“Mr. McKovick,” said Dealie McGinn, after a prolonged and deepening silence, “will you be that good to tell me what, too, brings you here the day? And I am minded to ask what brought you the last Choosdah and the Choosdah afore that, to say naught of Mondah week and a Thoorsdah or so?” Her tone of vexed inquiry recalled Markovitch from his reflections, and after a moment's pause he widened his mouth into a broad, bland, and childlike grin. His hands, dangling between his knees, plucked at each other, and he looked upon Dealie McGinn with winking, softened eyes.

“You bin mine shaatz,” he gurgled, with ill-concealed delight.

Dealie McGinn, with impetuous scorn, beat him across the shoulder with her rolling-pin, and Markovitch, at this off-hand tribute, laughed aloud with joy. "You bin mine shaatz," he gurgled.

"Your shots—hey? It's you that's shot—half shot, Mr. McKovick."

"Yeaas—I bin you; you bin mine—mine shaatz—mine sweetheart." And Dealie McGinn, with a loud laugh, fell into a chair.

"Saints be!" she screamed with merriment. "All right, then. Sit by and do your coortin' regular. His shots—oh, glory be!"

So the wooing proceeded, proclaimed on the side of Markovitch by long and impressive silences; on the part of Dealie McGinn by gales of merriment and the uninterrupted baking of biscuits and pie. He sat in one seat invariably, his fists between his knees, and his square, bland face fixed upon this creature of his adoration.

To all her observations he made uniform reply, "Yeaas, I bin dink so-oh mineself."

And once he made another observation of his own. "I bin dinking," said he.

"It's your chief speci-*al*-ity, Mr. McKovick," she rallied, but Markovitch went on. He leaned forward, and with a sudden gesture, much as a lion might pounce upon a mouse, possessed himself of her hand. "You bin mine shaatz. Den some day—yeaas—some day we bin leave the army. I been dink I should be a farm."

Dealie McGinn emerged from her fit of laughter with a snort.

"You'd be a farm, eh? I'm thinkin', Mr. McKovick, you'd be not much bigger nor a potato patch with the size of you. You mean a farmer, hey?"

Markovitch nodded. That was his ambition. With thrift and sober living he had hoarded all his meagre pay, till now he had a snug sum laid by in his kit. Yes, he would take up a homestead claim, and rear cows and sheep, a horse or so, with perhaps another brood that already appeared large and vigorous in his mind's

eye — a fine picture that set his heart beating big within his breast. “Yeaas — I bin dink so-oh,” he murmured, and Dealie McGinn, rocking with merriment, cried, “Ah, git out with you!” Markovitch, without understanding the turn of this idiom, arose perplexed, and so took himself away. But when again he came back, Dealie McGinn looked at him softly, and for a while stilled her fits of high merriment.

Out along the edge of the towering hills, the herd took its way, journeying into pastures new, still stirred by that instinct which, in times now passed, had moved the buffalo multitude from one grazing land to another. They crossed from range to range, drawing down toward the trail that leads in from the western line; and the herd bull, petulant from many cares, lolled at the front, shielding his cows from the younger bulls who followed with a wise eye for opportunities. Absolute and men-

acing, the big bull roared when they drew too near with their gallantries; and, knowing the consequences, the others kept their distance. Thus they took their way down the ranges, and on the edge of a crest halted, troubled with a sudden alarm.

Three heads bobbed against the sky line, and the sun glinted sharply upon the barrel of a levelled gun. Irresolutely the bull faced the height, the cows staring stupidly and crowding in toward him. *Crack!* a rifle spoke. The sharp detonation roared from hill to hill, and at the shock a tremor convulsed the herd. Hunching up his shoulders, the big bull plunged forward, halted, stirred again, and fell forward upon his knees. From his black muzzle gushed a jet of blood, but with a mighty, violent plunge again he regained his feet. Once more the rifle cracked as he strove to lead the band in flight, again and then again. The spluttering fusillade racked the wild with endless echoes, and the big bull, rolling on his side, sighed deeply with all the

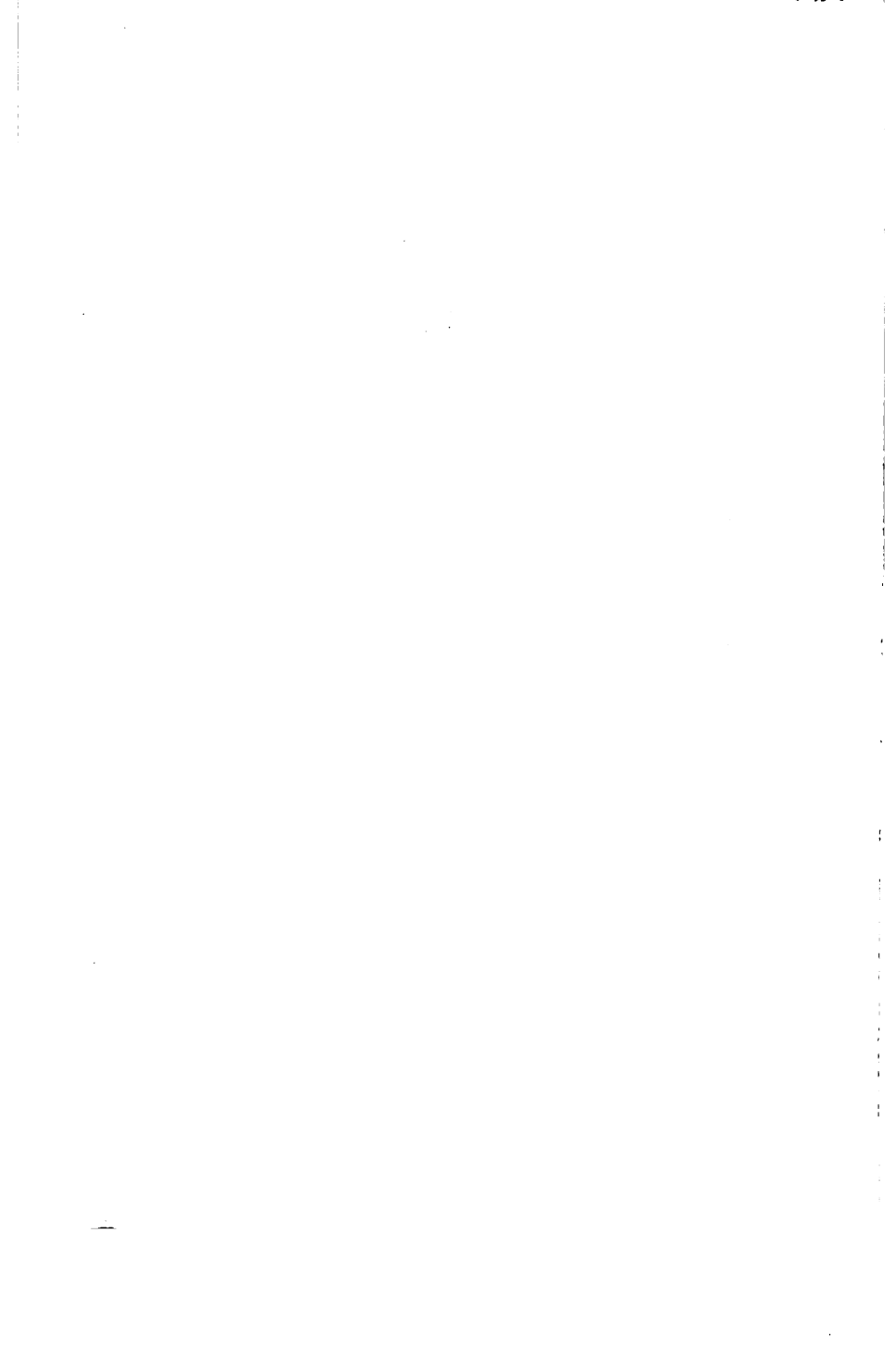
last strenuous power of his lungs, then breathed no more.

A galloping roan, flecked with froth, crashed out of the edge of the timber and came rating across the open. Markovitch, with a carbine held on high, was riding fast, and at the sight of the dead bull standing by his huddled cows, a shout of rage and despair broke from his lips. The roan shied from the dead hulk lying on the grass, and Markovitch, clutching at the saddle, regained his seat and galloped on. He rode straight for the hill, and at his coming a coatless figure rose and scuttled toward the trees. But the cut of the trousers and the way he carried his shoulders betrayed him. Markovitch saw and yelled again, "Eye-igh — Logan. Halt! Surrender!"

A puff of smoke streamed from the hill crest, and the roan, in full flight, dropped his nose to the earth, and rolled headlong like a rabbit stopped by a gunshot. Spitting out the dust, Markovitch freed himself



"The roan shied from the dead hulk lying on the grass, and Markovitch . . . rode straight for the hills, and at his coming a coatless figure rose and scuttled toward the trees."



from the gear of the fallen horse, snatched up his carbine, and charged onward. In his despair, vindictive at the death of the big bull, he forgot all caution, and what it meant to go against such men single-handed — men like Van Dyke, Howell, and Pendleton — those reckless, scut-faced rascals whose names are of ill omen in the Park. He dodged as they fired again; the bullet missed him, and one of the two arose and followed Logan toward the trees. The other, working at the breech of his gun, jammed by an empty shell, was still striving at it when Markovitch whirled upon him. "Surrender!" he screamed; and in answer the man clubbed his gun and struck him with all his force full upon the head.

They were gone; and Markovitch lay stretched upon the ground, with tense fingers clutching at the grass. Beyond lay the body of the bull, and a raven from the neighbouring wood hopped down to look about. An hour later, a patrol that had heard the shots galloped into the opening, and saw

first the bull, and then Markovitch. No sign of life was there but the inert forms, the marks on the hilltop, and the hoof-prints of ponies tethered in the wood. But they told the story plainly as if written.

Logan had long returned to the post. He hung about for a while, cleaning the bore of his carbine, and whistling a loud and rollicking tune. An hour passed in this way, then up the trail came the patrol, riding fast.

"Markovitch—they've got him for fair. They were at the buffalo when he caught 'em."

Logan shook himself together, and the tune failed on his lips. "He's sure dead?" he asked. "Ain't he?" He leaned against the sweating troop horse, looking intently at the rider.

"No—he ain't—not yet," answered the trooper, "but he's hard hit. They got him with the gun butt. Hurry up there!"

"Ain't dead!" gasped Slim Logan, but the man never noticed. Slim Logan, with

white lips, swore softly under his breath, and watched the patrol with eager, shifting eyes. "I'm off for the surgeon," he volunteered, and went inside. No one stopped him; he was still safe. He slipped into the men's quarters, glanced swiftly about, and fell to tumbling about the belongings in Markovitch's kit. Presently he found what he sought, and, dropping the packet into his coat,—the packet that held the whole hoard of Markovitch's savings,—went spurring down the trail. The day following an abandoned troop-horse, jaded and with hardly a foot left to stand upon, was found straying many miles beyond the Park lines. Logan was gone, a deserter, an outlaw with a price set for his capture.

"I saw him go by, ridin' awful," wailed Dealie McGinn. "Oh, if I had but known!"

Markovitch come back to life slowly, through many weeks of fever and delirium. Only by the ministrations of the surgeon and Dealie McGinn was he coaxed back from the brink of death, and then it was a strange

awakening. Past memories, speech, and all that experience had taught were swept away. His speech he regained quickly enough, and some memories returned with it too. But Dealie McGinn was as if he had never seen her—no more to him than the remotest stranger.

“Don’t you know me, lad?” she demanded, looking into his face intently. “I am Dealie McGinn.”

“Yeaas—chu var Dealie McGinn,” he answered, but with no real recognition, and turned dully away.

“Var is mine money?” he cried one day. They could not find it, nor could he. “Var is it gone? All gone!”

The affair of Slim Logan and the accomplice poachers was quite obliterated from his mind. The other men termed him now “the dummy,” and as he seemed mending too slowly to meet the demands of the service, he was forthwith discharged, paid off, and told he would be shipped back to the point where he had been recruited.

But the next day he disappeared from the Park.

Like the last refugees of the bison herds, Markovitch drifted to the north. He got work, first, as the cook of a cattle outfit, and after the round-up went toward the line with a pack train. Then, after roaming from ranch to ranch, ever apparently in search of something or some one, he crossed into Canada, and from Calgary at length reached Edmonton with a stray trader of his own tongue, an adventurer who had set forth on a pirating cruise through the Hudson Bay Company's protected ground. There the trader, for a variety of reasons, saw that it was wise to turn back; but Markovitch stayed, and there, too, the first of that wild, fatuous pilgrimage to the Yukon—the trying of the Edmonton trail—found him stranded, willing for any work.

Along these chilled and wind-swept ranges north of the Little Great Slave Lake was a relic of the former multitudes—the herd of wood bison, long ago come up from the

south. Generations had taught them the fear of man, and like uneasy wraiths they kept on the move, incessant in their change from place to place. They trafficked stealthily among the stunted timber, hardly venturing into the reaches of open ground, and they were fleet of foot, and as shy and crafty as a long-hunted white-tail buck. No stress of weather, no storm of sleeted rain or snow, dismayed them, and, once started, they travelled in wild flight many leagues. Few indeed fell to the guns of the Chipewyan or the Cree, and in that bleak desolation of muskeg, stunted fir, and rock land, they fought their struggle against their foes—hardily, a survival of the fittest.

Foremost in that mad folly—the Edmonton trail to the Yukon—went Markovitch. Inspired by the false and criminal encouragement of men that had much to gain and nothing to lose, he herded with the other unfortunates and plunged onward into that frozen wild. Day by day they toiled north-

ward, on foot and by canoe. High up in the north winter overtook them; they camped, and the scurvy broke forth. Some were abandoned on the trail, the others tried again to push forward, and the horror of that enterprise reached all the way from Athabasca Landing into the last remote reaches of Nelson River. Markovitch turned back. Starvation was at hand, but he knew that if he could reach the abandoned *caches* far behind he would live to escape. A disheartened company went with him, their faces cracked and blackened from the killing cold, stricken with swelling scurvy, and hardly able to plod. But he never complained, and with the stolidity that always marks his kind led the faltering caravan along that heart-breaking trail. Storm followed storm, and one day they missed the trail. Some were for turning back again, but Markovitch held on, swinging away by the compass. But after this their Dog Rib packers halted, and, beginning a wild pow-wow, would go no further.

They had come, then, into the sterile land that lies between the headwaters of the Hay and Peace rivers, and the Indians were dismayed. It was a land of evil spirits, where the wolf-woman and the other wild and awful spirits walked, and their hearts were turned with fear. They must strike toward the south, said the Indians, in distress, sul-
len and with fierce gestures. So they turned, and a half day's journey beyond saw the smoke of many camp-fires blurring the sky at a mile's distance. Markovitch's face beamed with exultation.

"Now we shall not die in this so awful place."

Loud shouts hailed them, and the last stragglers, in answer to the greeting, quickened their gait and came dashing up the ridge.

"Food—we shall eat!" cried Markovitch.

Like theirs, this party was but another of the luckless ventures of that trail of famine and death. It had turned back, easily dis-

heartened, long before it quit the last of the muskeg. Now, at full speed, it was hastening over the back track, bound for the Little Lake, abandoning most of its outfit on the way.

“Food — we shall eat!”

At the sound of Markovitch's voice, a man standing by the fire swung abruptly upon his heel. His face, cloaked by a caribou-hide *capote*, was hidden. Only his eyes showed, and in them there was a gleam of astonishment, a sudden quick look of apprehension.

“Dutch — you —” He checked himself as Markovitch looked around.

“Who calls?” asked Markovitch, but there was no answer. In Markovitch's eyes, too, was a gleam — a light of reawakening that came with a swift, sudden memory of some forgotten event. But it died quickly enough as he hung, hovering, over the fire.

They camped that night, and in the morning travelled together. For three days they kept on across the widening muskeg, through the dark and tangled thickets of fir, journey-

ing by a dim trail from day to day. Always the man in the *capote* travelled at the heel of Markovitch, watching. "You're called Dutch, ain't you?" he asked, and Markovitch nodded affably, with a little smirk.

"He's a little gone here," said one of the party, touching a finger to his temple, indicating Markovitch with a toss of his head. "He's a little gone, you know—sort of a dummy. But you can't beat him in the woods. He's a wonder. Can pick a trail almost blindfolded."

The man in the *capote* nodded. "Sort of a damned Jew, ain't he?"

"Jew? I guess not!" answered the other hotly. "If it hadn't been for him, when those Dog Ribs lost us, we'd all gone to pot, you bet."

Scowling, the man in the *capote* walked on, his eye following Markovitch.

A trail crossed the snow, fresh marks upon that almost unbroken sheet. Markovitch, with a quick start, leaned down to study the deeply printed slots. "Look—so!" he

whispered, all excitement, and the Dog Rib guides and a Cree packer crowded around, and with them again the man in the *capote*. "Yes, look at 'em!" the man in the *capote* cried, eagerness in his tone. "They told me they were in the country, but I didn't know they came thus far south. Look — three — five — a dozen — a whole herd of them!"

They were fresh, these tracks, not an hour old. The herd had just gone by, and the Indians, overcome with a desire to take the trail in pursuit, were arguing hotly with the head men.

"Fresh meat!" said the man in the *capote*. His eyes were glittering, and his hands shook as he cast aside his pack and unslung his rifle from its case. Markovitch swung around. The Indians, with heads bent to the trail, were away, the white hunter following.

"The buffalo!" he muttered. "They will kill the buffalo."

He stood erect, and with one swift glance followed.

The two Dog Ribs and the white man were scudding over the crusted snow, driving onward at full speed. Their pace was heavy, famine had told upon the Muscovite's strength, and he could not break their lead. But with all his courage he followed.

Under the lee of a fir thicket stood the herd. It had come down from the north, fleeing many leagues before a band of prowling Chipewyans. Here, far in the south, it had halted for food and rest. A cow, standing on the nearest summit, kept watch while the herd grazed up the wind. They were bigger and rounder than the bison of the Park; their hair was of a darker hue and finer; and longer, cleaner limbs told of generations of speed.

Off at the right went the two Dog Ribs, trailing their antique smooth-bores, the man in the *capote* taking his own way. He was circling to the leeward, and on the crest of the rise he stopped, dropped to his knees, and, motionless, looked ahead. Behind was Markovitch, racing on the snow. He saw



"Under the lee of a fir thicket stood the herd . . . here, far in the south, it had halted for food and rest."

the man thrust aside the *capote* and bend his eye to the sights. Near by were the Indians. loping along. They had not seen the herd.

A hoarse shout broke from the lips of Markovitch. He had recognized the other. There was Logan on the hill; below, in the hollow, was the herd.

“Hold! You shall not kill the buffalo!”

A shot followed, then a thunder of stampeding hoofs. Again Markovitch roared, the shout coming like an infuriated challenge to the man upon the hill. The Indians, dismayed, stopped and looked on. Markovitch, with his arms waving in a wild menace, was rushing upward toward the man in the *capote*.

“Logan — Slim Logan — chu shall not kill the auerochs! Ahr-rr!”

The Indians were running again, this time toward them.

“Surrender!” screamed Markovitch, and Logan beheld him with outstretched, violent arms, charging the hill, a wild, maniac light in his eyes. With a sudden terror Logan turned and tried to run. But his snowshoes

tripped upon each other; he fell again to his knees, and with a curse levelled his rifle at the running man. Markovitch dodged, and the bullet went wide. "Chu shall not kill the auerochs!" he screamed. "It is the law of the Park!" But again Logan fired, and the bullet went whining over the Indians' heads. With one impulse—with one fear that the man would kill them first—they let drive at Logan together. He was still kneeling, one hand working furiously at a shell jammed in the breech of his repeater, and at the two shots he pitched forward convulsively, spun around, and fell.

"Hoh—he is dead!" roared Markovitch. His eyelids twitched, a pallor swept across his face, and he, too, fell upon the snow, lying there with a sudden stiffening of his limbs.

Hastened by the shots, the other men of the party raced toward the hill. There was the tragedy before them. Logan was dead, Markovitch just reviving. He sat up, gasping and weak, and stared at the motley train,

at the Indians and the whites, all with faces drawn and cracked by the cold.

“Vat — vat var it?” he demanded. His eyes swept the stretch of desolation laid before him, and widened in grave surprise. “Var is the mountains? Var have they gone?” Then he saw the body of Slim Logan lying upon the snow. “Cheaas — he var of the droop. Vat vill the post say ven they hear he shall kill the buffalo of the Park?”

The man, thought the others, was plainly out of his mind. “What Park? What’s it all about?”

Markovitch’s air of wonder was renewed. “This — the Park of the Yellowstone!” he cried. “He var Slim Logan of the droop, and he have bin shot.”

They thought, indeed, that Markovitch had killed him, but then they saw he had no gun. After this the Indians were questioned. They sat there in the snow, and with a babel of Cree and Chipewyan, with many signs and rude figures, made it known that they had

killed the man. They were in fear of death; he was shooting them instead of the bison, and this man and the other were both mad.

"No, I am not mad," exclaimed Markovitch. "But the Park — var is the Park? And Slim Logan — vor vy is not the uniform of the droop, but this — a blanket clothes?"

Down from the upper forks of the Yellowstone came Markovitch, riding into the Park. He swung aside into the foot hills, and at the edge of a wide and open glade halted, looking across the interval. It was spring, and a loud bellow challenged from the timber's edge. Out into the open came a herd, a shaggy bull in the lead, followed by his companion cows. "Eye-igh — it is the spring!" he murmured, and rode on. He clattered then along a well-remembered trail, and after many miles drew up and dropped the bridle-rein across the pickets of a fence. Then he walked manfully up the path.

A woman was standing in the doorway, and it was Dealie McGinn. She stared at

the man, threw up her hands, and cried aloud, "Oh, glory be!" A wide and bewitching grin spread upon his face.

"D'you know me, laddie?" she shrilled, and the grin grew wider.

"Yeaas!" he gurgled. "Yeaas; you bin mine schaatz."

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE SNOW.

ONWARD led the track—a deep, unswerving trail—still pushing along the forest's snowy floor northward toward the upper reaches of the Kippewa. Beauchene now lay far in the rear, and through an interminable silence of unbroken winter woods the chase fared on, striking from the lower swamps upward along the open timber. Lemaire led, no longer stealing, cautious, with catlike steps through the bush, but plunging on, determined to wear down the quarry by a sheer persistence. One day was gone, another dying, and the moose—a big bull—still was travelling, vigorous in his stride. Once, lingering, curious and fearful to find whether the pursuit still held in his trail, he had shown himself among the trees. Then a futile bullet drove him on still faster.



"The moose—a big bull—still was travelling, vigorous in his stride."

Verily, Lemaire was right. "Hunh—deer," said he, "deer run round and round." He leaned over and heaved his pack higher up on his shoulders, moving the tump-line band where it had cut deeply into his brow. "Deer go round an' round. Moose not like deer. Moose know a place far 'way—moose *go there!*" He beckoned me to follow, and took up the trail. In the beginning, his eye had glistened with a vivid passion of the chase, but now it pored dully upon the tangled covers. "Bimeby moose get mad. Then moose turn round fight." But now the second day was ending, and the bull still postponed his temerarious last frenzy of fear.

The track dipped over the brow of a tall ridge, where, on the right, a thicket of black spruce turned their slender spires whispering toward the sky. Yet even this secret murmuring of the wind among the tops added to the utter quiet of the woods. Solitude was there, and a deep silence too.

Lemaire paused and brushed away the matted hair hanging before his eyes. He

swept the woods with an inquiring glance, hurried onward, halted, and then, turning abruptly from the trail, pushed through the abattis of a windfall. Beyond lay an opening in the trees, a narrow interval sheeted with snow, and at its head he stopped, transfixed.

Age had told lightly upon Lemaire. He carried the weight of his threescore years strongly, as the bull moose swings his heavy yellow antlers in the rut. His blanket mackinaw hung squarely upon his broad, determined shoulders; his eyes gleamed keenly, almost with the fire of youth. He stood, drawn forward, peering beneath his uplifted hand. Had he seen the game—*quick*—where was it? Lemaire shook his head and breathed deeply. His hand stretched slowly out, pointing along the interval. "Look—so," said he.

In the glade's centre was a cross, rude and uncouth, a vivid emblem of the loneliness of death, shining there against the black background of spruce, solitary in this

appalling stretch of solitude. Lemaire lifted the tump-line from his brow and made the holy sign. Silently, as before, he turned then, and pushed on. Night was drawing down, and anew the evening wind stirred among the trees. Dark and dejected, Lemaire threaded the dusky closes of the wilderness, silent till he reached a hollow under the hill. "Camp now," he muttered brusquely. "Pretty soon dark — bimeby cold, sartin mighty cold."

Still in this dark humour he scraped away the snow and laid a fire. He hung over it, husbanding its first flickering blaze, and in the glow his face showed heavy and drawn. From under the rim of his sable cap he pored blankly upon the fire; then, when it had burst into a cheerful flame, he put on the frying-pan, the bacon, the kettle, and the tea. "Tired out, Lemaire?" He turned stolidly, his expression unchanged, and slowly shook his head. "Hunh!" he answered, "tired to-morrow — nex' day — mebbe. Not tired now." Once more he

bent over the fire, turning the bacon with his skinning-knife, and shaking the kettle of tea. But this done, he fell anew into his slow dejection, and sat, stolidly glooming upon the dark forest's flank until the bacon was in a fair way to burn.

"Hoh-tay-o!" he cried abruptly, in the tongue of his Algonquin mother. "*Wee wuish a-shum-sun.* Tea — I am hungry!" Leaping to his feet, he snatched off the bacon and the tea, laid out his cups and birch-bark plates, and with a clattering knife fell to work at his food.

Overhead the stellar host burned with all their brilliance in the unclouded winter sky, and around the night camp a swirl of pungent smoke wreathed among the trees. Lemaire drew his blanket about his knees, and a garrulous pipe came forth and added strong incense to the clear and frosty air. Once a fox barked shrilly in the distance, and in the north an owl screamed its afrighted note. Lemaire listened. The echo passed, and the dead forest regained its quiet.

"Over there," he said, waving his arm broadly toward the north, "are many graves of my people. Where shall you find them? Mujizowaja — Abittibe — the lost Kwing-wishe — yes, in many places; from there to the big water on the edge of the high ground. There is where they sleep — many of them — yet *I* — I am here. Listen. Many winters ago — more snows than you have seen — the moose went eastward, and the caribou travelled far out there, far beyond this country — up there where there are no trees. Hunger then came to the tribes, and many died in the lodges. It struck the old people, and they were dead. It touched the little children, and they breathed no more. I myself saw it — for I was a young man then among my people — I and my brother."

He spoke, halting in his words, his language partly English, partly the *patois* of the French-Canadian, and here and there a hoarse guttural of Algonquin.

"There was no meat among my people, and the summer's dried fish was gone. Nor

were there rabbits, for it was the year of their evil, and they died. 'Come,' said my brother, 'we will go south to the Temiscamingue, the Deep Water, to the company post where my father's money waits. Then we shall buy flour and fat meat, and our throats shall no longer parch for want of tea. Come.' Fear, then, was in my heart. Many winters before had my father lived here among these my mother's people. He was a white man—like you—from the place where there are many houses. Yes, I have seen him. I am a big man like him, and my blood is strong. I do not blame him. He went away; but many years, when the fur canoes came down from the north, there was money for us at the post. He did not forget, twenty—yes, thirty—snows ago, when there was no money, I knew he was dead.

"My brother said these words, 'Let us go.' In my heart was fear. I looked about, and my mother's eye was on mine, as she lay weak among the rabbit blankets of fur. Down there—there at Temiscamingue—we

should laugh in our hearts at death. But how should our mother find her way? Even now death had touched her, and her breath whistled as she breathed. My brother spoke again. 'I cannot stay,' he said, and my mother's eye turned from him to me. 'Go,' she whispered; 'you are strong, and for me, death scrapes his finger upon the lodge's door. I shall go the long journey.'

" 'Why do *you* go?' I cried strongly, for he was my brother and I loved him. Another I should have pushed out into the snow, to go his way as he chose. But he was my brother. He did not speak, but turned away. Then I cried roughly to him. There was hot blood in our hearts, and he struck me on the mouth. No man had done that before, and my anger was great — mad like the she-bear in the spring. We fought — strongly, for we were big men. And as we fought there was a cry. We looked about. Our mother was dead. Then we fought no more. I heard the wailing of women in other lodges, and I longed to cry out too. But I was a

man and must not. So I sat beside my mother, and took her hand, and my brother sat on the other side, and took her hand too. I saw his heart had softened, and I was glad, and I thought that the hunger, maybe, had made his heart bad before. But then I did not know.

“The good father at the post had taught me many good words, and I prayed. I prayed in my own tongue. I felt it was good. My brother heard, but did not understand. He knew only the rum trader and the head man at the post; also only the fur traders who go up to the big water along the water trail. They say the words I spoke only in anger, and using them strangely. He heard my words, but did not know. ‘Listen,’ he said. ‘You cannot wake our mother. She sleeps on the long journey. Come, we will bury our mother, and take the trail to the Deep Water. Let us go.’

“He went away in the darkness, but soon he was back. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I have food. Eat and we will go.’ I looked at the food

and wondered. It was the meat of the caribou, dried, and there had been no caribou since two snows had gone. 'What is this meat?' I asked, and my brother turned his face. 'Eat,' he said, and I ate, tearing the meat with my teeth, like the gray wolf at the moose's throat. Yet I wondered. 'Come, we will bury our mother now.' But we were too weak with the long hunger. We could not dig the snow, and how should we, then, break the hardened ground. 'Peace, mother,' said I. 'I shall return in the long days — peace and sleep.'

"My brother waited by the lodge. I saw that he stepped more strongly, and wondered. Had not the long hunger made me weak who was once so much stronger than my brother? But my thought was like a dream, and I was dizzy like one who has the hot sickness and cries out strange things that have no meaning. I followed, but I knew that it was the upper trail — the long path leading to the big water — the *Kitci-gami* — at the edge of the high ground where there are no trees.

‘This is not the trail,’ said I; but he shook his head and bade me follow.

“There was light, for the night had gone. We went to the north, and by and by there was a trail of two people in the snow. I looked and saw that they led back and forth, and that one was a woman. My brother took my little bag of food from me, and threw it down at the door of the last lodge. It was the place of the chief’s son, and he was wealthy. Many winters have passed since then, and I have forgotten his name — Muckwa, I think it was — Muckwa the bear. He too died in the long hunger. But I cried out, knowing that he had much and we little for the journey. It was many camps beyond to the deep water, and I tried to seize the food. But my brother laughed, not like a man, but like the cackle of Kwingwishe, the meat bird. ‘Leave it. Peace! There is more and better, and I give him that. Go on.’ I came away, for I walked still in a dream, and nothing was as it should be. Then we came to where the long *muskeg*

touches on the pond of many moose, and we crossed upon the ice, following in the tracks that the man and woman had made. There my brother stepped from the trail sharply, as one turns from the moose track when the wind is blowing and the moose has turned to lie down where he can smell the foe on his trail. 'Come,' said my brother, but I kept on. He called again, but I kept on many steps. Before long I saw a man in the snow, and he was lying down. He slept, I thought, and there was the trail of a sledge in the snow and the tracks made by the feet of many huskies. 'Look,' I said, crying out, 'here is a man from the big water where the streams run the other way. Come, we will waken him.' I saw he was from the north, for he wore the high moccasins of fur made from the big otters without legs, that play on the rocks of the big water over there. Also, he still held in his hand a bone knife, such as there was not among our people. 'Hoh!' I cried, but he did not awaken. Then I saw that he was dead. He had

been stabbed in the back, and there were the marks of the woman's feet beside him. 'Hoh!' I cried, 'he is dead!' But my brother did not come, but beckoned me on. I followed, and called out to him, but he gave no answer. Then I ran, falling this way and there, like my people when they have tasted the trader's rum. But my brother ran too, and we reached the edge of the bush. I heard then a dog bark, and another. In our people's keep were no dogs, for the last had been killed long before in our hunger. Then I looked and saw a sledge and dogs, and it was of the country where there are no trees. I knew, for the sledge runners were of bone, and lower than we use here where the snows are deeper than the reach of the biggest moose. But I saw no more, for I fell, and my mind turned from me. I was like the dead man in the trail; I knew nothing.

"When I awoke, I lay in a sledge and we were on the ice. We crossed there and went up into the bush. There I saw a

woman waiting among the trees, and now she ran with the dogs. I covered my face, for still I was weak and did not know. 'Hoh!' I cried, 'it is our mother's spirit, and she walks beside us in the snow!' But a laugh answered, and it was not my mother's voice. I looked again, and the woman turned. I saw it was Pin-e-ah, Muckwa's wife, the stranger-woman who came from up there where there are no trees. She was smaller than our women, and her face was round, with eyes turned up—so. Nor could she speak our tongue when first she came among us. She ran now beside the dogs, and I said, 'Tell me, O Pin-e-ah, where is thy husband? Does he come with us? And this, no doubt, is his dog-sledge.' But she laughed, and ran beside the sledge. 'No,' she said, 'this is the sledge of good Maätuke, who rests up yonder a while. Peace to him.' I thought for a while, but did not understand. Then I knew. 'Hoh—it is Maätuke lying up there in the snow. He is dead, and, brother, thou hast slain the

stranger.' My brother's heart was black, and he made no answer. But Pin-e-ah laughed, crying out, 'Twas I that did it,' she said, and I wondered at this woman of evil. She laughed, singing, like the hunter when he has killed the moose, and blood was on her hand.

"Listen," she said. "He was my lover over there—in the land where there are no trees. Then Muckwa came, and he was stronger, so I went with him. He brought me here, into the land of the big sticks, and I was his. Now, in this the long hunger, Maätuke comes with his dogs to take me, for he has heard of the trouble among your people from the hunters that have gone into the north. Yet I do not go with Maätuke. He is waiting. He is lying in the snow to rest after his journey." She laughed again.

"Hoh!" I cried, stopping the dogs. I arose, walking beside the sledge. "Tell me, O Pin-e-ah, why is thy husband Muckwa not with us? There is food and plenty here for all." Again she laughed.

“‘Also he is lying up there beyond. Let him lie and rest himself, for he will have a long journey if he follow, pot dog that he is.’

“I followed in the sledge trail, wondering, for I did not understand. ‘Tell me, my brother,’ I asked, ‘why does this woman come with us?’ He looked, and showed me his teeth, like huskies fighting over a rotten fish. ‘Have done,’ he spoke, ‘she comes with me.’

“Three days we journeyed, and I grew strong. Boasting, this woman told me all. At the beginning of the long hunger, because she knew by the signs her people learn that it was there, she had saved largely of Muckwa’s food. She had laid it where no hand but hers should take it, and Muckwa soon felt the grip of the hunger upon him. But she had not given him of her hidden store. She had fed herself and then my brother, bringing in her hand a piece each day. Thus they had lived, and our mother had died, for he was to keep up and have this woman for his own. ‘And

Muckwa?' I asked. 'What of Muckwa, O Pin-e-ah?' She looked and laughed.

"'Twice have I said it. Muckwa lies over yonder. He is gone on the long journey. He left nothing, yet good Maätuke brought us meat.'

"Then I knew that the bag of food my brother had cast before the door of Muckwa's lodge was but an offering to the dead. I cried out, for my heart was sad, 'Peace, O Muckwa, son of Kab-a-o-sis! Peace to thee.' For he, likewise, was dead—dead because of this woman that had come down from the land where there are no trees. 'O Pin-e-ah,' I said, and my heart was hot with anger that was for her, 'thou art a thing of evil. Was not Muckwa thy husband, for he ran beneath the blanket with thee?' And she laughed aloud, while her eyes shone as those of the wolf-devil when he sings outside the hunter's fire. 'Ay, he was my husband according to thy people; but am I a *kimack*, a mangy sledge dog, that is whipped among the traces, that he should beat me with his hand?'

“Again I wondered, for this woman was not like the women of my tribe. ‘Tell me,’ I said, ‘among thy women is not love taught with a hand that is strong?’ She arose then, drawing her blanket about her. ‘Many women are there who listen weakly while the dog whip cracks, yet I am not one. I am the daughter of a chief, and my will is strong, like the mad-wolf, that cannot be driven in the traces among the dogs. Over there’ — and she waved her arm toward that country many camps beyond — ‘I am called in our tongue Amaroke, the She-Wolf, and so shalt thou know me.’

“My brother sat by the fire. He wound a thong about his gun-barrel, that was broken from the wood. He spoke not, but his eyes looked upon the woman, strong with flame for her. Again my heart was troubled, and I looked at him sitting by the fire.

“‘Hark!’ I said, ‘O my brother!’ I arose and threw the blanket from my shoulder, for speech was on my lips. ‘Hark! O my brother! This woman that thou hast taken

to thy breast is a she-wolf, and if thou cling to her she will gnaw at thy heart. Turn this woman away, my brother, lest thou die as all have died who follow.'

"Then this woman looked at my brother in the eyes, and, seeing what they spoke, looked boldly at me and laughed. Nor did she look with hate, but as the young woman looks at her lover when he brings home plenty from the hunt. 'Have done, O Muskosi-Amik,' she cried, calling me by my Algonquin name; 'am I to be like the wounded caribou that is driven from the herd? Thou art a strong man, but I too am strong.'

"Then she wrapped the blanket about her head and lay beside the fire.

"Three times again we camped. Three times by the fire I cried out to my brother that this woman was a wolf. 'Let us turn our faces on the trail,' I said, 'and take back this woman to the place where Muckwa lies dead within his lodge.' But my brother made no answer, and Pin-e-ah laughed, looking at me with eyes that burned wetly,

like the doe's when she licks her spotted fawn.

"Six camps we had come, breaking out the trail. Late the sun left its place among the trees, and early it lay down again, for it was the heart of winter. My brother went ahead, beating down the snow for the dogs, and the woman ran beside the sledge. I too went ahead when my brother's feet were tired, but it was not I that led upon the ice. One camp over there we came to a running water, and it was singing beneath the ice. 'Hoh, my brother,' I said, 'we shall go a little way before we cross this running water. lest we break through and drown.'

"But he laughed aloud, and there was anger and evil in his eyes. Maybe, then, he had seen the woman looking at me with eyes wet like the mother doe's; but I do not know. 'Come,' he said, 'is my brother a coward that he keeps the shore like Ginibig the wood snake? Come.' And I said no more. Then my brother drove the whining huskies forward, and the woman fell behind,

watching. 'Thou art a strong man,' she whispered, 'and no coward.' And I saw her eyes peer up into mine. 'Go!' I cried, striking her off, but she only laughed. My brother went on, three sledges from the shore, and I heard the ice speaking out. 'Come, O my brother!' I cried; but the ice spoke again. Then it broke across till I saw the river underneath. 'O my brother,' I cried, 'thou art gone, and this woman hath slain thee too!' But again I saw him, fighting for his life among the dogs, and, forgetting all, I ran and drew him out. But as we came toward the shore, again the ice split across, and both were in the water. Then I heard the woman, and she was lying on the bank, and her hand was stretched toward me. 'Thy hand!' she cried, and it was to me she spoke. 'My brother drowns!' I cried; and again she spoke, but to me. 'Thy hand, and I will save thee.' And I took her hand, but held my brother by his hair, and she drew us both ashore. Then we sat on the bank and looked. Our sledge was gone,

its dogs, and all our meat. I only had saved my gun, for I had dropped it when I ran to my brother's help. So we sat on the bank till our clothes were stiff, like the fur of the beaver when it is dried upon the splints.

“‘Come,’ I said, ‘the deep water lies over there more than seven camps away, for now we walk. But there is no meat, and we shall die!’ Shaking, my brother arose, for the cold had touched his bones. One day we walked and camped. Half another day we walked, and my brother sang. He saw it was the spring and that the fur canoes came down from the north while the traders sat in the fort. But I, who was of clear mind, saw that it was still the winter, and that my brother went this way and there, like my people when they have tasted the trader's rum. ‘Tell me, my brother, why do you sing?’ I touched his skin, and it was hot, like the horns of the moose in the spring. I saw his eyes, and they were red and looked nowhere. Then I knew that my brother had the cold-sickness, and my throat

with fear was so that I could not swallow. So I walked on, holding my brother by the waist, and the woman walked behind, saying nothing. We camped, and in the night my brother talked aloud, so that the forest was full of sound. But when the sun came from the trees, he was still breathing like the caribou before it dies. He will die without food, I thought. I will look in the forest. I took my gun and went into the bush, walking a short way. I walked a little further. Maybe I would see a rabbit. Then I looked back, and there was the woman. She was walking behind me. 'Come,' I said, 'you shall sit by my brother while he sleeps. You shall not follow me in the snow.' But she held up her hand, holding the palm outward. 'See,' she said, 'I have brought the food.' Food she had, indeed, of the dried flesh of the caribou. 'Tell me, O Pin-e-ah, where did you get this food?' And she laughed. 'Strong man, you would turn me away in the snow. So I have saved the meat of the caribou, and hid it within

my breast. It was to keep me on the way, so that I could follow in the trail of the dog sledge.'

"I took the food and held it in my hand. 'Why do you give me this?' She looked away, but I saw that her eyes were soft.

"Again I spoke to her. 'Why do you give me this meat of the caribou?' 'I know not,' she answered, 'lest it is that thou art strong and that I would have thee, O Muskosi-Amik'—calling me in my Algonquin name. Then I spat upon the meat, and threw it on the snow. 'Go!' I said, and walked among the trees. I came to a ridge, and there was a moose. He was a big bull. He yarded alone because he was big. 'Hoh!' I cried to myself, 'there is a big bull. I will kill him, and my brother shall live.' I raised my gun. Then I put it down again. I prayed, saying the good words the father had taught me. Then I raised my gun, and fired. I saw him fall, and ran in shouting. But he got upon his feet, and went away. I looked, and there

was blood upon the snow. I saw his hair where the bullet had cut it. I saw that it was yellow, and I knew I had hit him too low. I lifted the blood upon the snow, and it showed no froth. 'Never mind,' I said, 'I will follow. Maybe he will fall.' So I followed a long way till he came to the ice. There he ran fast, and I could not catch him. So I came up to the camp.

"My brother lay by the fire. I heard his voice, and he talked with Muckwa—the dead Muckwa, who lay in his lodge over there. They talked as friends, for they had often taken the caribou together. But the woman spoke shrilly, bidding him be done. 'Peace!' I said, standing before the fire. She looked at me, and saw that there was blood on my hands, where I had lifted it from the snow. 'See,' she said softly, speaking that my brother should not hear, 'the strong man returns and there is moose meat. Come, we will go and skin the moose.'

"'Have done,' I said, 'I have not killed the moose.'

"I sat beside the fire. 'You have food,' I said; 'give it to me, so that my brother may eat.' She drew her blanket about her, and rose up. 'No,' she said, 'he is already starting on the long journey, and needs no food. I and you shall eat.' I thought a while, 'Shall I kill this woman?' Then I remembered the good words the father spoke, and I said, 'No, I cannot kill this woman.' So I said:—

"'Pin-e-ah, give me food; I am hungry.' I said to myself, 'I will get this food, and give it to my brother.' So she gave me a part of the caribou meat, and I made a pot of birch bark. I thought to myself, 'I will boil it for my brother.' She sat beside me, and put her hand upon my shoulder. 'Listen, O Muskosi-Amik,' she said, calling on me by my Algonquin name. 'Thou art a strong man, and shall live. I will go with you.' She looked at me with her eyes wet like the eyes of the mother doe, and I trembled. For I was afraid of this woman, the She-Wolf, who came from the land where the

streams run the other way; from the land where there are no trees.

“‘Hoh!’ cried my brother, rising up. He threw off the skins, and looked at the woman. Then he looked at me, and at the pot of birch bark boiling on the fire. ‘Hoh!’ he cried. ‘There is food, and yet I starve!’ He reached for the pot, but the woman struck down his hand. ‘Hoh!’ he cried, ‘am I Muckwa to die like this?’ He struck the woman on the face, and she fell. ‘Peace, O my brother!’ I said, and he turned, roaring strange words. ‘Thou, too,’ he said, and fell upon me. The fever-madness had made him strong, and I was a child in his arms. He threw me on the snow, holding one hand upon my throat. In his other he held the skinning-knife. ‘Hoh!’ he cried, putting it to my throat, ‘thou, too, shall die.’ He raised his hand to thrust, and then I should have died. ‘Peace, O brother!’ I cried aloud. Then I heard a loud noise and my mouth was filled with smoke. My brother fell on my face, and his hand

loosened upon my throat. My eyes were blinded, and my face was sticky wet as with sap when the trees run in the spring. 'Hoh!' I said to myself, 'I am dead.' But I was not hurt. I pushed my brother from me, and looked up. Pin-e-ah stood beside us, and my gun smoked in her hands. I looked about, and my brother lay upon his face. He was dead. 'You have killed my brother, O Pin-e-ah,' I said, and she shook her head. 'No — yes — and I have saved thy life.'

"'Thou hast saved my life, but look, thou woman of evil, thou hast slain my brother.'

"I sat by the fire and the night went away. I saw the sun come out of the trees. I wrapped my brother in his blanket and carried him into the bush. The woman sat by the fire and held my gun between her knees. I saw that it was loaded again. 'Give me my gun,' I said, but she shook her head. 'I will keep thy gun, O Muskosi-Amik,' she answered, 'and I shall go with you, following behind. Come, shall we go?'

I looked at her and smiled, lying like the traders in those days when they took the fur of the tribes.

“‘Yes, you shall go, and I shall carry the meat you have, because I am strong.’ Then, too, she smiled, calling me a strong man, and handing me the meat. ‘But I will walk behind.’

“‘Give me the gun,’ I said; ‘I am strong and will carry that too.’

“‘No, I will walk behind, carrying your gun.’

“So I walked ahead, and when we got among the trees I ran. ‘Do not run!’ she cried, and I looked behind me. I saw her point the gun, and jumped behind a tree, like the deer when he is frightened. Then she fired, and I went back, unharmed, and plucked the gun from her hands before she could load again. I took the powder and the bullets, and she crouched at my feet like the husky when the whip cracks over him in the snow. ‘Come,’ I said, ‘we will go. Come, chief’s daughter, She-Wolf from the land where there are no trees.’

"I led her among the trees, and she wept — 'Ay-I-ay-I! You will take me with you on the way?' I said, 'Yes,' but smiling no more. 'Yes, I will take you on the way, Pin-e-ah. It is a long journey we shall take.'

"It snowed then. I went a long way, camping twice, and we came into this country. It snowed again, and hid our tracks almost under our feet. 'It is good,' I thought, 'for this woman from the land where there are no trees cannot find her way among the bush. Good-by, O Pin-e-ah.'

I ran and she followed. But I was a strong man, and ran far ahead. Then I hid in the bushes, doubling on my track like the bull moose when he rests. I saw her run by, calling; she was calling me in my Algonquin name. But I let her go by. I knew she could not find me, nor could she find her way among the trees. So I laughed, for my heart was bad. I walked away and camped. I sat in the snow, with my blanket about my knees and a little fire between. She should not see my fire, I said. Once I heard her

calling in the night. She called then three times, and after that she screamed like the cat-owl when he hunts. I smiled. When the sun came up from the trees, there was no snow in the sky. So I walked back a long way, and there were her tracks. I followed. Sometimes she ran, but not for long. But I was strong and soon caught up. She had fallen in the snow, yet she was not dead. I watched, and she arose from the snow. She looked around and ran. Sometimes she yelled, for when one has a fear among the trees and is lost, he runs and wastes his breath in screaming. So I watched her a long way, and then I went back to my brother where he lay in the snow. 'Come,' I said, 'I will take you to the fort, and then you shall lie among your people. Come.' So I took him on my shoulders and — many days I walked — and brought him to the fort.

"'Father,' I said, 'here is my brother. He is dead, and I have left the woman from the land where there are no trees over there in the bush.'

“‘You have done evil, my son,’ he said. ‘Go find the woman who was from the land where there are no trees.’

“So I went to find her. Many days I looked, for she had run far among the trees. It was when the sun shines longest that I saw where she fell. A bear had been there — Muckwa in his spirit. He had torn the woman from the north, for his rage, no doubt, was great. So I buried her, and this is her cross that stands in the bush.”

Lemaire arose and threw a log upon the fire. The leaping flame lighted his face, and calmness lay upon it. He stood a moment staring into the snow. Then he waved his arm broadly.

“Many snows have passed since then,” he said.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE END OF THE TRAIL.

EASTWARD from the head of the Little Tobique, the breasting ridges sweep upward into the pinnacle of Bald Mountain in the north. Austere and lonely, the peak, mantled with gloomy conifers, frowns down upon the houseless forest marches where Nictau and Bathurst gleam like gems lost among the trees; at the south writhes the Mamoziekel through swamp and barren ground, while on the other hand is forgotten country, until one comes into the upper reaches of the Upsalquitch.¹ Thus in the solitude it stands, genius of the untrammelled wild, long ago the place of Manitou where the pagan Milicete prayed when thunder muttered among its crags. Even to-day the moose

¹ Pronounced Ab-see-goosk.

and the uneasy caribou ply among its thickets; for, in a word, it is the wilderness itself.

It snowed. The flaws flew across the breast of the mountain in blue, bewildering flurries. It was spring, to be sure, but even in the lowlands winter lingered. The moose herd, haggard from battle with the passing season, had broken yard, and were abroad in search of food. Along the awakening streams the red willow was bursting into bud, and on the southern slopes rare sprigs of green showed bravely between the wasting drifts. One by one, the old bull, the cows, and last year's calves wandered from the winter resting-place; and after months of frozen bark and acrid evergreen the tender buds were delicious morsels. They revelled in the feast, feeding heavily, and with the rising day lay down to ruminate in content. All were uncouth and gaunt; there were cavernous hollows in their flanks, while, rusty black, their winter coat fell in patches from their sides. In

the lead walked the stiff-legged bull, guarding from the trees the horns just sprouting sorely from their pedicles; and at his heels was a companion cow, weary and big with her burden; behind her, a last year's calf skipping awkwardly, with awakening spirits. Thus they bore down into the lowlands, and there a little stranger came into the world.

Surely it was a cheerless coming into life. The snow pellets flipped freezing among the trees; its first sensation was of chill. The wind, rioting down from the mountain, roared a rough lullaby among the treetops, while the shuddering cow stood over her calf, swaying like a weaving horse. Then the snow flaw passed, and the sun broke weakly through the cloud bank, dimly lighting the copse wherein the uncouth little one lay. Uncouth, yes; for there was neither strength nor beauty in the calf. Its legs were long, too long for grace. Its puny body seemed hanging unfitly upon these shambling stilts, and their thinness and utter inability were displayed

more obviously when, later, it shuffled loosely to its feet. But mother pride saw much even in the spindly yellow shanks and quivering form. The cow moose, whimpering like an eager hound, drooled over her offspring, mouthing it with tender concern. She rubbed her cheek along its flank, her beady eyes for once doting softly, while the heir to all this heritage of trackless solitude trembled in the wind.

It was a bull calf, and this much the mother saw: its legs, though seeming puny, were really big of bone; there was a telling breadth of brow; and the dip of the chest told, too, that it would have heart and a strenuous power of lungs. She noted the reach of its hocks, and the height between its elbow and the crest of the hump, and knew from these that, one day, as a great bull, this her offspring should be a lord among the giants of the hardwood ridges and the swamp. So she was satisfied.

The first steps of the heir were in the blind valley where it was born. The place

was shut in at each side by thickets of birch poles and straggling, stunted spruce. At one end was a steep acclivity; at the other a shallow stream, that leaped and bubbled down the pitch from the dead water above to the big bay in Nictau below. Life seemed a pleasing fancy, indeed, until one day the calf learned that there are contrasts in existence. It did not learn then, though, that life is a struggle to the last, and that the last struggle is the last of life. All that came gradually. Its first fear was in its first fortnight. The herd had ranged up to the head of the blind valley, and lay in a tangled windfall under the hill. The calf, rising to turn around in the little hollow it had worn among the leaves, saw something lithe and bright sweep like a shadow from one fallen trunk to another. Softly, as slowly as ever, the lithe creature on the tree trunk crawled nearer, its eyes glittering, its pads velvety upon the bark. Then a gust of wind swung down the hill, and the cow lumbered fran-

tically to her feet. The calf, too, smelled something, and, in sudden concern, frisked back to its mother's side. Simultaneously the creature on the windfall leaped, but missed its prey. With a muffled roar, the cow lunged at the intruder, who fled abruptly, with a screech. Then the calf learned that this was something to be feared for a while, a great, gray Canada lynx,—a coward to big moose, but a terror to the young. With its nostrils still rank with the scent of the marauder, the calf clung trembling to its mother's side, while they clattered away from this perilous place, seeking rest anew in the black cedar swamp across the caribou barren.

After this encounter the calf's nerves were on edge for a week, at least. A creaking tree trunk or a sudden gust among the tops set its heart pattering with fierce, impulsive beats. But timidity is the first great lesson of life for the creature of the woodland, where eternal vigilance is the only hope of existence, and suspicion, the only

reasonable impulse. With this terror in its breast, it learned to try the wind at every breath, its nostrils wrinkling tremulously at each unwonted sound. Its mulelike ears were forever whirling about, like vanes upon a steeple, eager at every turn, and at the least false note in the droning monotone of the forest it would stiffen into rigidity, with every nerve aquiver, every sense alert. It learned, too, that when a moose lies down it never fails to make a loop to leeward on the back track, so that it may be warned by scent of any enemy hunting along its track.

Another adventure taught this when the cow, one time at evening-tide, had slipped down the bank to water at the brook. The calf, lying like a leveret in its form, was trying all the lessons it had learned of artfulness and concealment, when a crackling in the brush set every sense alert in verity. It listened acutely, its ears fixed immobile. Again the brush crackled, and something wheezed, *Snoo-oof!* In the dusk,

the calf saw a rolling, black-haired thing, rollicking through the thicket, rise upright across a fallen log. Its forearms lolled upon its breast, and a sharp, thin nose stretched upward, sniffing. Behind were two other bundles of fur, small and fuzzy, scampering along with ludicrous imitation of every gesture of the bigger one. It seemed amusing, — very amusing, — amusing until a sudden shift in the wind brought to the calf a rank and evil odour. At the horrid, terrifying scent the calf crouched lower; it would not be seen. But here there was another thing to be learned, — here something that was trying along the forest with a sense of scent sharper than any sight. The big, black figure of fur could not see the calf crouching in the nest of leaves, but it could smell. *Snoo-oo-ooof!* The first slant of wind had brought the scent to the bear; for this was the marauding enemy that had fallen upon the trail. *Snoo-ooo-ooof!* The calf heard. The bear stood as rigid as stone, its head alone moving as it swept

to and fro, searching the idle air. A pause followed, the cubs sitting up on their hams and wondering at their mother's manner. *Snoo-oof!* The hair on her neck ruffled forward and her eyes gleamed. It seemed like a dream; was the creature moving? Yes, softly, catlike, step by step forward, a shadow dark and menacing. On came the bear,—nearer, nearer. The calf closed its eyes to shut out the horrid sight.

A crash—a thunder of feet! The brush crackled with a heavy tread; there was a snort of fierce anger. The eyes of the calf flew open. There was the mother cow charging down the hill, her beady orbs flashing red, her mane upright. Her rush carried her down upon the cubs, and with one dexter stroke she trampled down the bigger of the pair, maiming it for life. Roaring in turn, the she-bear, with open paw, struck a swinging sweep at the cow's flank, but failed to stop her onslaught. She rushed the hill with broadening stride, and butted the calf to its feet. Possessed

of every terror, the little moose swung into its mother's gait, when a long cry sounded behind them,—a thin, wailing note. It was the cub in agony. Hooting and whooping like a thing bereft, the she-bear whirled in her tracks, abandoning the futile chase, while the cow and her calf, splashing across the shallow dead water, rejoined the herd, and swung away to the northward through the dark forest closes. With the rising of the moon they had turned the shoulder of the mountain and were footing the oozy shallows of Mud Pond, where high above the whispering trees frowned the pinnacle, gray with lunar light.

With all these perils, timidity became the second nature of the calf, fear its first instinct, and flight a ready impulse. It learned to skulk and crouch like an over-harried deer, in coverts whose colour shaded into the hue of its hide. It came to distinguish sounds and their meanings, to school itself in the sense and scent of

woodland ways, to fear or to ignore as the circumstance showed. Meanwhile it grew.

Man then came into the wilderness. The summer was well under way, and at evening-tide the cow and calf stood breast-deep in a dead water, guzzling the tender grasses, — skimming the surface with distended maws, while they tore away great mouthfuls. They fed with the eager movement of wild fowl, drawing in their necks and then distending them at full length, their flaccid lips fingering the vegetation. Their mouths made a busy, clucking sound while they ate, and sometimes they plunged their heads to the muddy bottom and wrenched the grasses by the roots. Beyond them stood the bull upon the bog, wagging his ears in a cloud of pestering flies, but otherwise soberly content. The last year's calf was there, too, up to his back in the water, and only his hump and head showing. He had finished feeding, and was laving his flanks in the tepid swamp water. With dreamy eyes the little

one looked about, and there out in the pond was something loglike floating softly along. Curiously the calf gave it a second glance. It did not seem like driftwood; there was neither wind nor current to set it along, yet it moved, gliding nearer and nearer to the moose family faring at the mouth of the bogan. The calf turned around; the bull saw too. He muttered once, and in fixed rigidity stared across the pond. But, like all moose, the bull, despite his sagacity, lacked the power of distinguishing form. Movement he could discern at a glance; a muskrat or a mink skittering across the pond would have caught his attention. But his mortal enemy, man, might have sat on a log ten yards away and passed unnoticed, were the wind wrong and the man unmoving. However, there was something familiarly evil in this floating bulk out there upon the pond. He had seen such before, far down the little Sou'west Mirā'michi, when a flash of flame streamed from a log like this, and

something wheening through the air bit him deeply upon the shoulder. In memory, too, his ears dinned, as if he still heard the crash of thunder that followed the spurt of flame. *Niff-ff!* The bull drew in a deep breath, his nose ranging upward slowly, like a halter-bound horse. They were all standing stiffly now, peering at the yellow tree-thing out there in the water. It did not move; there was no sound; and they felt their confidence return.

Across the pond a rising gust flickered the leafy treetops. The flaw came on, blurring the glassy surface and stirring the sedges on the shallows. It sped murmuring on its way, a momentary visitor, and wheeled southward over the mountain's flank. Plunging about in his tracks, the big bull pounded across the bog, the water flying in his trail; with crash after crash, he sought the forest cover. At his heels shacked the last year's calf, crazy with fright, while the cow, in a sudden flurry, ploughed up the bank, driving her

own before her. Scent told its story. Mindful of its lessons, the calf nosed the passing gust, and sniffed in that harbinger of evil,—a subtle, terrifying taint, noways like the scent of the marauding bear and lucifee. The cow's terror inspired the calf to haste, but as it followed the flight it took opportunity to read with its nose, for future reference, the telltale warning in the wind. Thus they flew across the bog at energetic speed, and, trampling through the fringe of high-water drift, dived into the forest blackness as a rabbit skips into a warren.

This was the first meeting with man. Fraught with vague terrors, the calf breasted through the brush in the wake of the cow, leaping the windfalls with a snorting breath and the clatter of swift-pounding hoofs. Through the swamp they plunged, routing out a herd of woodland caribou, who fled before, their round, broad hoofs clacking like castanets, and the din lending desperation to the calf's endeavour.

It had seen and scented man, and terror and frenzy fixed the memory in its mind forever.

Autumn found the moose family ranging on the long ridge at the north of Nictau. The calf, lusty with gathering strength, forgot a few of its fears. It was alone with its mother; for between Nictau and the Mamoziekel the cow had lost the big bull and the last year's calf, and it was not sorry. With the first touch of September rutting wrath the bull had grown rough. His horns, hardened and strung with ragged strings of velvet, seemed menacing; and besides, he had a way of shouldering the others in a manner annoying. Once he charged the calf, who sought refuge in a bunch of birch poles, where the big bull, with his wide-spreading antlers, could not follow. Grunting savagely, the bull turned on the last year's calf, and, roaring, drove the youngster over the crown of the hill. The last year's calf had been swaggering about before this in the proud consciousness of a pair of stubs.

He had tried them once upon the calf, after an evening spent in brushing them up against an alder pole, when the calf squealed in pain. These spikes were less than a span long, and were not handsome; but the last year's calf thought them mighty weapons. So when the big bull chased the roistering braggart down the ridge, the calf was sincerely glad. It hearkened while the pursuit clattered down among the hard wood, the last year's calf squealing in terror, and at this juncture the cow turned and made off in the opposite direction. The calf had no alternative but to follow. Deserting the others, they rounded the mountain again, and once more returned to the thick swamp at the head of Mud Pond and the Bathurst Carry. Here they made their stay, clinging to the cover during daylight, and stealing down to the shore of the pond only when darkness drew its mantle over the woods.

Here they were standing one night when the calf heard from the other shore a long-

drawn note go droning over the moonlit water. It was simple and low, ending abruptly in a plaintive guttural. The cow and the calf cocked their ears, listening, while the faint echo spoke from hill to hill. Then silence fell anew on the forest, and the cow went on feeding. A half-hour passed. The same moaning intonation droned again, now louder and more appealing. The calf lifted its head, looking eagerly at the cow, and wondering why she did not move away from this vexatious sound. But the cow knew the meaning of the disturber: it was only another cow calling, and what heed should she give to this intruder's untoward plaint? She sniffed as if in disdain, and resumed her feeding; and the calf, convinced that this was not a source of peril, was guzzling at the grasses once more, when still another note struck a discord upon the silent night. *Unh!* The calf had heard that sound! It had not heard the love call of a cow moose before, but it remembered how the big bull had grunted when he chased the last year's calf.

Unh-oonh! Was it the big bull still hectoring the arrogant stripling? The calf listened. The bull, whoever he was, swung over the crest of the ridge, stirring the night with the clanging of his horns upon the hard wood, and at every other stride grunting, *Unh-unh-oonh!*

E-ee-eee-u-uu-o-ooo-eunh! It was a cow's answering call, soft and muffled,—a dulcet murmur of invitation. On the ridge there was silence for an instant; then *Unh-unh-unh!*—the bull was coming on. He was eager,—too eager for safety. He plunged down into the pond,—slosh, slosh, slosh,—grunted once, and was silent.

A rippling detonation crashed upon the stillness. The roar rattled against the mountain side, and beat back with staccato echoes peeling heavenward in a chaos of sound. A second followed; then night became abominable with the rattling, crashing reports. Dimly the calf heard between the shots a heavy splashing on the shallow shore, a turmoil of peeling echoes, and a cry, "He's down!"

The cow and the calf fled from what they knew was a horror — for them. But it was a triumph for the men beyond on the pond. The big bull had been sacrificed to his pride of conquest. He had been tolled in to die in the pursuit of a graceless, grotesque imitation. His last liturgy had been his own masterful, deep-lunged answer to the hollow cheat of the birch-bark horn. He lay on his side now in the mud, one broad-palmed antler jutting from the water that was red from the slaughter. For the first time the calf had been in the presence of death.

They abandoned the precarious place, ranging leagues northward into the untold fastnesses of the Upsalquitch. Here they found refuge again, clinging to this drear, unlovely solitude; the cow, lorn in her lonesomeness, making sorrowful the darkness with her call. At the waning of the moon she was solaced, for across the night came the bark of an unmated bull hastening to the courtship. She answered; the bull drew nearer. At length he stood in a thicket

across the bogan, and beat the bushes with his horns, striving to draw the cow to him. He was taking no chances; but when the calf squealed for the cow to return, the bull knew this was no cheat, and came rioting across the bogan, bristling and bold with ardour. The calf hung about, complaining, but the others gave no heed, and for once in its life the heir was left to its own devices. Then, when the dawn came, all three slunk into a thicket, the calf forlorn and drear.

It was growing cold, — bitter cold. The bull, the cow, and the calf wandered southward, homeward once more to the mountain. Between Nictau and the Mamoziekel was a long hardwood ridge, where they would yard for the winter. The bull's interest in possible rivals soon ceased. He was no longer the eager, braggart bully of the rut, but once more a suspicious, slinking creature, shy and timorous. With the first of the snow they shortened the range, and settled down in preparation for the long winter siege. At the base of the hill was a brook, and over the crest

a hollow pocket sheltered from the wind. Thickets stood on every side, and the browse was rich and limitless. With all this food and water comfort seemed assured.

Into this haven wandered, one day, another moose. He was battered and lean; one ear was slit almost to the butt, and a long, fresh scar lay on his flank like a burn, — the marks of encounters with other bulls. With a sudden concern, the calf saw that the frayed newcomer was its early enemy, the last year's calf. But there was no more insolence or oppression remaining. He was content to take a peaceful place with the herd, and to feed about, insignificant and almost unnoticed.

Softly fell the snow, day after day. It sifted through the trees silently as the falling of a star, clogging the brush with its heavy mantle. Ere long the herd's excursions were cut down to passage along the ridge upon which they ranged. In their prospecting for feed the moose trod great paths to and fro, breaking out fresh lanes through the heavy banks as the browse became exhausted. Ice

and snow had transformed them before December ended. The bull's horns were caked with frozen slush; his mane was a tinkling fringe of icicles. Their hair, too, was heavy and often blurred with dirt, and they walked laggardly and with hanging heads. Their struggle against wind and weather had begun.

Over the crest of the hill came a crouching figure,—a man. He was peering here and there eagerly, crawling onward a step at a time. His eyes were sharp and keen; his swart Indian features were drawn with the striving passion of the chase. On the soft going his snowshoes made no sound, and as silently the twigs parted across the smooth fabric of his mackinaw as he shouldered a way through the brush.

Something moved the cow to suspicion. She rose heavily and whirled about, staring at the figure on the hill. The Milicete's head rested on his arm, and a brief pause intervened. Then the woods dinned with the rifle's roar, and the cow plunged forward on her knees. Leaping to their feet, the other

moose halted, snorting. A second shot added its clamour to the reverberating echoes, and, wheeling in their tracks, they hurled onward down the hill, the brush cracking and crashing in their wake. Again the rifle cracked, and the calf lunged forward. It felt the lead rip like fire along its flank, and, spurred to mad desperation, it pushed ahead, the *crack-crack* of the gun following as it fled. Then it plunged over the dip of the hollow among the hills, and silence once more fell in its train. It was alone; for, far behind, the cow lay on her side, her head resting across the round of a fallen tree, the snow red and dreadful about her. Eastward went the calf, and then, miles beyond, unable to stagger farther, it rounded to on the ridge overlooking the second and third Bathurst lakes. Convinced now that its safety lay in solitude, it drew away from the other moose, and, worn and lonely, yarded the remainder of the winter, orphaned and dull.

Spring came, freeing it from the prison of snow. Remembering the quiet of the

Upsalquitch, it wandered northward, and, unmolested in this desert of swamp and bogland, grew lustily. By the end of the summer it had become as sly and crafty as any creature in the wilderness; also, it was growing a pair of stubs on its forehead, and dignity was in its ways. As the fall came, with a brush of reds and browns for the trees, a new, whimsical humour seized it. In its heart was a longing to wander, to return once more to the mountain in the south, to see what things were happening on the range, and above all to seek the society of a mate. Leaving the Upsalquitch, it rambled on its way; pausing at times to paw up potholes in a swamp, or to beat its stubs upon an alder bush, as the big bulls did.

Ranging to the shore of Mud Pond, the yearling sloshed across the shallows, treading the soft ooze and spattering mud head-high while he pushed his way through the tangled bush upon the shore. There in the thicket he paused, listening to the soft voices of the night. His heart was filled with ardour,

and the lust of battle surged dimly in his mind. He longed to prove himself among the other bulls, but discretion warned. Yet once, to try himself, he grunted the guttural challenge of the mating bull, and the answer was electrical. *E-ee-eunh!* He heard the soft and wooing response, — *E-ee-eunh!* His mane bristled, and the hair on his neck puffed outward. After a moment's pause he grunted anew, — *Unh-oonh!* Many minutes passed, while silence fell again upon the wilderness. Then again, *E-ee-eunh!* — a short, muffled call. *Unh! UNH!* the yearling grunted, — *Unh! oonh!* Like a whirlwind he roared out of the thicket, a deep guttural punctuating every stride. At full speed he drove across the mud bank, smearing himself to the flanks, and with his hair bristling, his eyes red and snapping, he swung about the point, and snorting hunched himself to a standstill.

There, almost under his nose, was a canoe, clearly revealed in the moonlight, and the air was strong with the scent of man — man, his

mortal, terrifying enemy. Too frightened to flee, he stood there staring down on the birch bark, and softly and silently it moved. Pal-sied, he beheld it drawing near, yet flight was forgotten. Nearer and nearer it came; then the bowman dropped his elbows, and at this gesture the moonlight glinted on a gun barrel.

"It's a calf!" said a voice, disgustedly.

At this the canoe swung abruptly around, but still the calf stood there in stupid astonishment.

"Sartin fool moose—hunh!" spoke another voice, unmistakably Milicete.

A setting pole hurled through the air, end on like a spear, its blunt end banging the calf in the ribs. A sudden 'bellow of terror burst from him, and, leaping like a lucifee, he sought the bank and sped away, sweating in an agony of fear. That ended his romancing for a time, but still the season had another lesson in store for him. The encounter on the pond taught him then and there that circumspection and craft are needed even in matters of love; but it did

not teach him that age and weight count much in a tilt at arms. He had ranged over to the dead water north of the Mamoziekel, when he came face to face with the slit-eared bull, his old acquaintance.

Oonh! said the slit-eared bull.

Unh! challenged the yearling.

They came together with a crash of flying deadwood, the yearling forced back on his haunches. He struggled to his feet, and resumed the charge gamely. But by a sudden turn the spike-horn bull caught him on the hip, pierced him almost to the vitals, and then, pressing the onslaught, drove the yearling, baffled and bellowing, down the closed reaches of the cedar swamp, and away to safety over a near-by hill. That finished the yearling for the season; but he laid by, for future reckoning, a memory of this shameless, unmerciful beating. Fate destined that he must wait. The year passed, and a second season found him glorying in the company of a mate, a sleek, velvet-sided cow, who had never walked

abroad before in the glamour of a honeymoon. Jealously he guarded her from the attentions of another stripling who was plying about the premises. There on the caribou barren he had beaten him off in a battle royal, and, scarred and bleeding, but withal triumphant, he returned to find his old enemy, the slit-eared bull, in charge. For an hour they fought and trampled upon the oozy battleground, until once more the younger bull was an outcast and a wanderer; and, beaten, disgraced, and without heart, he slouched away to his old retreat between Nictau and the Upsalquitch.

The years had passed,—six, eight, ten, perhaps. Plenty snows, mebbe, as Tom Bear, the Milicete, said. Somewhere between the Sisson Branch and the head of the Little Tobique the bull was wandering, black, bulky, and heavy-humped. He was a colossus now; no longer like the weakling that had come into life in the blind valley on the mountain's flank. His horns, broadly

palmed and fixed with a fringe of bayonet prongs, were the terror and envy of the herds. He had run a long course, and in the burnt ground below the Wabsky and the Odell, he was a monarch absolute, his crest scarred with the wounds of a violent sway. Time had taught him nearly all that a moose can know. He could discern the cheat of a birch bark horn almost as far as he could hear it; he had been tracked, hunted, and fired at, until the crack of a rifle was almost as familiar as the crash of a tree falling in the woodlands. Yet he still lived, mammoth and noble.

"Oh, so big — hunh!" exclaimed Tom Bear, the Milicete, stretching both arms to match a spread of horns. Tom was in difficulties. He was in jail at Andover, and with no vision of relief before him. But there had come a man from the lower settlements, looking for moose, and had sought Bear in his enforced retreat.

"Yeh — umph! They got a *wickhagan*¹

¹ Milicete for "trap."



"He was a colossus now . . . his horns, broadly palmed and fixed with a fringe of bayonet prongs, were the terror and envy of the herds."



on Tom. Ain't so bad be in lockup. Only debt, this time."

"Only for debt, eh? How much?"

It was not a great amount, and the man from the settlements freed Tom Bear by a payment. Then they journeyed north, the Tobique in their wake, and the Sisson Branch before them. And about this time, perhaps, far up at the head of the brook where the flying caribou traffic among the barrens, a mighty contest was waging on the forest edge.

Once more the bull confronted his slit-eared rival. The other's strength and resources had grown too. His horns matched almost, in their bigness, the bull's broad spread, and he was big, too, in bulk and limb. *Oonh! Unh!* he grunted. His cow, lying hidden in a thicket, revealed herself, walking with a slow, stretching stride out into the open barren. The bulls' crests hung low before their swollen necks and manes bristling with eager rage. The cow coaxed urgently, as if gleeful of the coming encounter for her sake. She plied back and

forth along the prospective battleground, watching, waiting; then the champions swung together with a crash.

The night clattered with the sound. The bulls' antlers clanged like meeting metal. Their palms gritted as they strove and struggled, grunting, gasping, fire in their eyes. *Unh-unh!* They locked their horns anew, their shaggy heads shaking, and the froth flying with the strokes. The moon arose, staring down upon their baresark frenzy, while they drove their hoofs into the soggy soil; and each time they shocked together the solemn reaches of the wilderness clanged with the tumult. Standing at a distance, the cow whimpered and whined and drooled across the open ground with moaning intonation. At the call the two fought with further maddened energy; and at last, inch by inch, the slit-eared rival began to give way. His head was matted with blood and froth, his eye was dim and evil. At the first sign of conquest the coming victor plied himself afresh to conquer.

He lunged back suddenly, and again, sweeping forward, his hocks straining for the impulse, launched himself upon his foe. Clang! clang! Their antlers struck together, wrestling. The slit-eared bull fell back. He tried to turn and fly, but the victor unmercifully pressed him down. They wrestled then anew, their antlers grappling like arms, when, with a sudden, swift onslaught, the slit-eared bull was hurled backward, vanquished and half dead. With his last remaining strength he fled to cover, the victor's prongs thudding a quickstep on his ribs and thighs, while the cow, calling low and clearly, bade the victor return to her charms. Thus, in the rising dawn, old scores were wiped out, and a memory of disgraced defeat lived down.

Across the bog, at noon, came Tom Bear and the man from the settlements.

"Uh!" exclaimed Tom Bear, clutching him by the elbow. "So — see!"

The ground in a dozen different ways was torn and trodden, and hoof beats marked

the acres. The Milicete ranged to and fro like a working hound, marking a fleck of blood or a patch of hair upon the wasted moss. He saw the battle in these signs, and pointed at last where the beaten bull had fled to cover for his life. Then, ranging wider, he found the slots of the victor and the cow, moving northward across the barren to the heavy covert where the caribou had beaten an open trail. Swiftly and soft-footed he followed, and at the edge of the open hard wood halted, and raised a warning finger.

"So — big moose — big fellow. Call him out, mebbe. Think same one — yes, mus' be big fellow — so big." He spread his arms again, his dark features lighting with elation and the lust to kill. "Call him out to-night, mebbe — dunno. Try all same."

Every instinct of the Milicete was aroused in his awakened craft. He pitched his pack into a windfall, and strode off, catlike, into the forest. Presently he was back again, satisfied that the bull was resting, not far

away, from the rigour of the conquest. He drew out his bark horn, and shaped and trimmed it anew, a lurking smile on his dark visage, yet, as if ashamed of his outburst of excitement, more taciturn than ever. He watched the sun sweep across the zenith, and at last, when it was setting behind a dusky fringe of brush upon a distant hill, the two crawled out upon the bog, and sought concealment in a bushy island at the centre. There the first sorrowing of the moose call spread its tremolo across the forest passes, whining away into the distance in low appeal. The hills gave back the call; then silence followed, while the dusky shadows trooped across the solitude. So rose the moon, her pale light transforming the woodland aisles, now ghostly dim and supernaturally quiet.

The echo of the horn beckoned from ridge and summit, at last tapering away into a perspective of hollow sound. Then silence fell. Somewhere in the distance a night bird cried, its booming note trying

the straining silence anew, while the dead air lay soundless among the sleeping trees. Once more the Indian called, the birch-bark horn persuasively ringing the sonorous cadence of a calling cow, — *E-ee-ee-uu-ooo-uuu-o-unh!* Their ears roared in the stillness as they strained to catch the faintest sound. Minutes passed; they called again, and then out of the distance came the answer, — *Unh! Unh! Oonh!*

“Zut! Listen!” The Milicete bent his ear to the earth, his nostrils quivering. “Moose comin’ now — big bull — huh — listen!”

Far distant was the sound, — sharp, abrupt. It was half the stroke of an axe, half the bark of a dog. They heard it draw nearer; now a deep guttural, emphatic with passionate rage. It swung across the edge of the barren, drawing nearer, while the Milicete’s tense respiration roared like steam from a vent.

“Big moose — mus’ be careful. Let him come ’long slow!”

Over the night floated a low, imploring call. The Indian held up a warning finger. "Cow try call him back — huh!" He put the birch bark to his lips, and, with the horn close to the ground, moaned softly, — *E-cuh!* A crash in the brush answered, and again the real cow complained to the deserting bull. Strong in the faith of his recent conquest, he plunged on through the brush, beating his antlers upon the trees and grunting harshly. But his craftiness and learning did not forsake him in this venture. He strayed only to the edge of the bog, and there stood, grunting and threshing in the thicket, eager but suspicious. In vain the Milicete coaxed and besought, the forest sorrowful with the horn's pleading; the bull clung to cover, and would not show himself. Even the squealing bawl of a calf moose failed to stir him.

"Mebbe him mad yet," muttered Tom Bear. "Try him wit' fight."

Rasping the horn among the bushes, beating and striking at the bushes with

the bark, he simulated the noise of a bull threshing his antlers in a fury. *Unh! Unh!* he called; then *Ooonh!* It was the last stroke of cunning. Ploughing through the covert, the bull dashed out on the open, his fury awesome, his mane and the hair upon his neck bristling with his spleen. He charged the bushy island, grunting at every stride, a figure of terrifying rage.

Crack! pealed a rifle-shot, its splitting stroke clattering thunderously. *Crack!* again it sounded. Wheeling in his tracks, his frenzy spent in sudden fear, the bull sought safety in flight as speedy as his charge. "*Shoot!*" cried the Milicete, his voice pitching across the babel of echoes following in the train of the rifle-shot. "*Shoot!*" Again the world reverberated with the shattering explosion, but the bull kept on, unchecked. With a crash of breaking wood, an uproar of cries, of treading hoofs, he was gone, convulsed with terror, yet once more unharmed.

"Hunh!" the Indian muttered, "big moose — so big!"

His contempt was obvious. He turned his back upon the shuddering sportsman, and, drawing a blanket from his pack, rolled himself in the folds and ungraciously sought sleep. Meanwhile, across the forest, driving his way before him, and with the timorous cow clattering at his heels, the bull once more turned his way northward, seeking safety from man in the untracked depths at the north of the Tobique.

"Moose gone; Injun go home now," said Tom Bear at dawn. He ignored the other's protests, and sullenly set along the back trail for home. Two days later another *wickhagan* sprung on Tom Bear; for he was taken up in the road at Andover, too drunk to stagger, yet muttering and murmuring under his breath, "Huh — so big moose — damn!"

Northward, ever northward, worked the big bull. He swept across the bogs and barrens of the Sisson Branch, swinging a little eastward to round the edge of Nictau. But one glimpse through the trees of Bald Mountain looming large upon his path drew

his heart away from flight. He turned, and, crossing the head of Mud Carry, ranged southward anew, but along the eastern flank of the peak. There, between Bathurst and the Mamoziekel, he halted, and once more, after a week's passage, was unrestrained of fear. So, until the coming of the first snow, he plied his way along the ridges, a master of the range, jealous of his solitude, and ready to try the issue with any other bull.

In his jail retreat, Tom Bear's memory dwelt upon the moose that had come charging across the open that night upon the bog. Fretting and peevish, he awaited freedom, intent upon returning into the wilderness to take up the trail again. Once out of the limbo of the law, he plunged into the heart of the forest; and then for many days they heard no more of Tom Bear,—no, nor for many months.

December was waning. The last bear had gone hooting to its den, while the caribou were "using" now along the open bogs.

The prowling marten, the black cat, and the lucifee were already growing lean on winter fare, and the black hide of the moose was dingy and thick in the face of the bitter weather. Following the trails the Indian came into Nictau, where the peak was blue-white with the clustering snows. Thence he ranged southward, ever looking for that track, searching the winter ranges, trying the ridges one after the other, and in the end falling upon a slot a span's length long.

"Huh! him so big moose!" he muttered.

It was late in the afternoon; another hour and the dusk would slink into dark. He gazed a moment at the sky; then wet a forefinger and tested the wind. Settling his blanket coat about him, he set off almost at right angles to the trail, swinging slowly to a parallel course, and, cautiously working onward step by step, sought along the forest for his quarry. His craft told him that the moose was near, and the Milicete's knowledge — "White man go fast; moose go faster; Injun go slow, catch him lying down"

— was before him. He crawled along, in fact, peering over the crest of the hills and searching the hollows before he showed himself. Then, on the brink of a little pitch, he straightened suddenly and threw up his gun.

The bull was lying in the same blind valley where he had been born into the world. Man, for the moment, was forgotten; yet, there on the crown of the hill, man, evil and destructive, was staring down with glittering eyes. His memory fled back to the day when he had ranged this covert as a feeble calf. There was the place where the leaping lucifee had crouched to spring; here the very windfall under which the mother cow had rested at the time. Overhead, even as in the ages past, the peak loomed heavenward, confronting the clouds with its majesty, its breast clothed with wisps of vapour, and the ageless forests at its feet.

Listlessly the wind stirred round the gully, and the bull shambled to his feet. He stared up the slope, and saw the Indian's rifle spring to aim. An instant's pause, a moment of

baffling effort; he swung ponderously about, his heavy bulk moving undeterminedly in the close confines. Then the woods clattered again with reverberating echo; he strode the windfall at a single step, and from his shoulder a gush of blood spattered the untracked snow. In his wake followed the repeating thunder of the gun, while his ears sang with the whimpering bullets flying after. Heaving up the farther slope, he drove madly through the copse; a riot of sounds, of crashing stubs, of horn ringing upon hard wood, marked his way through the thickness. Away to the northward, and behind, a patient, merciless enemy was picking the way, and gloating over the red blurs upon the trail.

Night fell, yet still the bull ranged on. The blood had ceased to flow, but his shoulder was stiff and working sorely. Through the silent forest he took his way, clinging to the ridges where his horns were unimpeded, skirting white-veiled ponds,—northward, northward toward the blank depths of the Upsalquitch, the one safe haven

in this hour of unwonted peril. With the dawn he circled on his back track, and lay down on the crest of a hill, where he might see an enemy from afar. A few hours of inactivity stiffened his shoulder until it was an agony to move. Looking backward, he saw something loping along, keeping steadfast to his trail, and peering eagerly ahead. It was his enemy — coming. Wearily he struggled to his feet, stood watching for a moment with lowered crest, and then took up again the flight. Over hill and barren, northward across the tangled sweep of lake and stream, sounding the ice with staggering feet, the bull plodded, the foam freezing upon his jaws and the wound burning upon his shoulder. Miles farther on he paused again, browsing scantily, and lying down once more. But his rest was vain. The loping figure, persistent, unmerciful, was still clinging to the chase, following the broad slots in the snow, and with the one object of destruction before it. Night fell when the chase had crossed far beyond the upper end of the

Nepisquit Carry, the bull lagging along, blundering his way through the brush, his breath heavy and hoarse. Here he rested during the dark hours, rising at the dawn to plod still farther northward in weariful effort. So far he had outwitted the destroyer; but then, whose persistence was to win in the end? The Milicete, with the obstinate purpose of his race, had determined. It was ordained, for had not nature given the moose for his food and covering? He had taken up the trail pledged to follow the quarry till endurance on one side or the other should fail. At night he camped on the track, resuming it when the light was high enough to show the way. Onward, ever onward, went the chase, the miles falling in their wake, and the distant pinnacle growing blue in the perspective.

A sudden frenzy of rage overwhelmed the hunted creature. He turned, a living, quivering form of fury. He beat the bushes with his horns, grunting, his mane bristling as in the days of rutting wrath. The Milicete, far

behind, heard the challenge, and smiled darkly. He knew. Ere long, now, the quarry would be at bay, But a shift in the wind brought the taint sweeping forward to the swaying prey, and, his fury deserting, he fled as before.

Desperation fell upon the heart of the fleeing creature. He felt his strength departing, and a longing, deep as the desire of love, suffused his breast. He paused at the crest of a ridge, and looked backward across the rolling stretch of forest to where the mountain swept up from the plain and clothed its breast among the clouds. There he had drawn the inspiration of life, and there he should die. The fastnesses of the Upsalquitch were too remote for him to hope that his remaining strength would bear him to them. Yet irresolutely he felt that safety lay in that dark region far in the north, and irresolutely he turned. Gathering his forces together, he swung westward, and by a long loop cleared his pursuer. Then, with the goal set before him, he shacked away to the

south, the last fires of vitality burning with renewed vigour. Night came again, and at the following dawn he was still going. His eye was dull and sickly, and the breath had frozen in long icicles upon his muffle and fringe. He lurched along through the trees, his head hanging low and a fever burning in his wound.

The first flakes of the coming storm fell among the trees, and the chase hurried on. It crossed the ice at the foot of Nictau, and, skirting the edge of the cedar-bound bay, made onward along the mountain's western flank. The moose hobbled painfully, every step an agony to his burning shoulder. But across the ice, when he paused on the edge of the forest to look back, was the same loping figure, inevitable as the passages of death. He hurried. Climbing the edge of the valley, he plunged over into the hollow, and there before him stood the place of his last mortal struggle. Behind a flanking windfall he paused, his breath roaring, his head to the foe, and a grim resolve manifest in his eye.

A sound stirred him. A loping figure was swinging through the woods, brushing its way through the thickets, and peering along the vistas. Haste and eagerness bespoke themselves in the Milicete's manner; the time for the killing had come. The bull drew himself together, his orbs bloodshot and the breath whistling through his flaccid nostrils. Once more fury possessed him. He waited; the figure of death drew nearer. He gathered his energies in mad earnest. Skulking like a caribou calf, he waited until the Milicete was almost upon him; then, silent, he hurled himself upon his destroyer.

A spurt of flame flared through the dusk; a din of thunders surged in his ears. He felt something shock his very vitals with a touch of fire. Blindness was upon him. He plunged forward; another crash. There was man, and the rage of the moose was sublime. His enemy, appalled, sought to leap aside. His snowshoe tripped upon a stub; he stumbled and fell. With a downward, cutting stroke of a fore foot the bull struck

him to earth as he sought to rise, and stood over the prostrate, battered form, trampling in insensate fury. But he could not see; his knees were weak beneath him; with a last, gasping roar he lunged forward, strove to rise, and fell back, with his antlered crown resting across the bole of a fallen tree. Then the snow fell, soft and white and obliterating. Overhead was the mountain, dark and austere, looming large upon the houseless woods, and in its shadow the tragedy, cloaked with silence.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUNGARVAN WHOOPER.¹

ACROSS the face of nature strode McTaggart, a gallant figure in the foreground. Through a vent in the top of his hat a tuft of sandy hair arose like a sprig of sorrel, while over his breast one red suspender was latticed in relief as vivid as a ribbon of the Bath upon the breast of nobility. But what cared McTaggart for splendour of raiment? His trousers, overwrought by adventures with the windfalls, flapped their pennants about his legs, and a jail delivery of his toes seemed impending through the holes in his moosehide moccasins. His manner, however, with all the woe of his garments, was gayety itself, and in one hand he flourished a fish spear, — three iron prongs upon an ashen staff. Cautiously, with catlike steps, he walked out upon the sluiceway, and,

¹ From the *Atlantic Monthly*,

peering into the pool below, scanned the depths as one glances down a bill of fare in search of a dinner ; for thus McTaggart prepared to dine.

“ Ay,” he cried with glee, “ a fat fish and a big un ! ”

Lewis — frayed and weatherbeaten like his companion — looked up from his work in the canoe, and threw back a sarcastic comment.

“ Stab him, then, ye thief ; or if he sees ye he’ll scoot, and we’ll be to bed hungrylike ! ”

Now, even out into the wilderness the laws of her Majesty’s province reach a jealous hand. Without payment for the privilege, you shall not take her fish, nor shall you kill her game. Also, under no circumstance, shall you stab salmon with a spear. It is a misdemeanour, — brother to a felony, almost, — but what cared McTaggart for that ? It was from Wiggin, lessee of the salmon water, that he was poaching ; and between them no love was lost. Here, by a sharp and graceless trick, the newcomer had bought the river

rights, thus ousting Burling, who long had held the lease. Friendship runs deep in the woods, and Burling was the friend of McTaggart, — his patron and employer, — so McTaggart consoled his respect for the law with the idea that to steal Wiggin's fish was fine poetic justice. Moreover, he and Lewis were in need of food, in itself a sufficient reason. He raised his arm, his eye upon the salmon scouring the gravel below, and at this instant Lewis called out in alarm: —

“Sawny, quick! Here's Wiggin!”

But the spear had driven downward, McTaggart, with a grunt, striving against the frantic writhing of the transfixed fish. Then, with a dexterous flirt of the elbow, he started the salmon upward, and landed it, gasping and quivering, upon the sluiceway.

“Leave it!” cried Lewis, “leave it!”

McTaggart was not of that kind. But he had worked for his dinner, and would have it even in the face of Wiggin and of all the statutes of the Dominion. He clutched the fish by the gills, leaped for the canoe, and a

moment later the bark dipped over the brink of the pitch and ran its frightened course among the rapids.

A cry told that they were pursued. They saw the lessee and his warden, Gower, launch their canoe in the eddy and ply after them with eager effort. Bending to the paddles, they urged their craft along until, rounding a turn in the stream, they plunged into the mouth of a bogan, and were hidden from view. But still, with galloping strokes, they pushed onward, resting only when a long stretch of dead water lay between them and the river.

"Ugh!" grunted McTaggart, "did ye hear 'em holler? 'Twas like the Whooper — ay?"

"The Dungarvan Whooper ye're meanin', Sawny? Like enough it was. I hear tell, man, too, that the Whooper's come back to the upper Miramichi. It's sore for the man that meets him, or Wiggin ayther."

McTaggart leaned back to laugh, hooting in derision at Lewis's misgiving tone. "Pish, Reddy! Ye're that much of a born fool ye'd

be hearkenin' to the last ole woman's tale to be settin' ye dramin' the weeks to come. The Whooper — fiddlesticks ! ”

“ No sich at all, ” — this in protesting key. “ Ye'll be sayin' next there's no sich as the boggy. Ye'll hole yer tongue, Sawny McTaggart, in the face of others better infarmed and ov longer experience. Wit' these eyes I have nex' to seen the Whooper, and was it not me, — ay, I ask it, — was it not me that found Tighe the teamster dead in the snow wit' a horrid light in his eyes that'll be lookin' heavenward till the last angel trumps ? ”

McTaggart scoffed him idly, for the tale was not new. At every hovel along the river, in every camp in the forest, along the logging roads, and on the spring drive, it had been told with all its variations. At every fireside, woodsmen whispered the deeds of the something that went galloping through the forest aisles, grim and grotesquely crying, whooping into the distance. There were stories — detailed and sinister — of men left out overnight ; of the brush crackling with a

heavy tread, of an unseen horror that shrieked when disturbed. Half-breed, Indian, white, all had their tales to tell, some braggartly scornful, others tremulous with fright. Tighe they always told of, — Tighe, the teamster, found dead in a winter logging road, a red mark across his throat, and, far down in a black cedar swamp, the sound of awful derision. McTaggart shuddered mockingly, while Lewis rounded up the story.

“Horrid, Reddy, and may the Whooper get Wiggin for his sins! But ’twixt the two, lad, ye’ll be losin’ yer wits to a cat-owl. Ay, man, but I think — Ho! what’s that?”

A crackling in the brush broke the silence as some heavy body lunged through the brake. McTaggart, with an exclamation, seized the fish spear, while Lewis, pale-faced, crouched in the canoe. They listened intently, the brush crashing anew.

“Ah-r! Look at there!”

McTaggart pointed the spear toward the forest edge. A black bulk stepped out striding down the bog growth, — a moose, a big

bull! But here, high up in the New Brunswick wilds, a moose is a familiar of the solitude. It was the size of this bull, the width and breadth of his growing antlers, that transfixed them with amazement. It was a bull moose, such as the two had rarely seen; and silent in admiration their glittering eyes took in its unmatched bigness. At the shoulder it stood higher than a work-horse, — black, blurred with the mud of a noonday wallow, in its uncouth greatness it seemed a stray from the primeval ages. Its square gray muffle, tentatively trying the air, swung from side to side; then, as if assured of safety, it crashed down the bank, plunging to its flanks in the muddy run.

“Reddy, Reddy, will ye look!” McTaggart cried, under his breath. “D’ye see the scar on the shoulder, forrard, eh? D’ye mind the Wabsky—the one down there Burling shot at? Ay, ’tis him, the beauty!”

A long, narrow blaze, half hidden by the hair, showed upon the shoulder,—the mark of an old bullet wound. Dipping to his crest

in the muddy run, grunting and guzzling in his hunger, the moose began his evening meal; and while his head was lowered beneath the surface McTaggart pushed the canoe along, the water whispering under the prow. He was bound to have a nearer view, though Lewis, in the bow, felt his fears grow painful as they glided down upon the feeding lord of the swamps. Stroke by stroke they drew nearer, McTaggart murmuring in admiration. The moose looked up, a slow suspicion manifest as he turned his head along his flank, looking backward toward the canoe. For a moment he stood motionless in stupid fright; then an angry terror transformed him. They saw the hair of his hump rise bristling, he snorted, and plunged around.

"Look out!" exclaimed Lewis, launching himself backward on his elbows; "look out! He'll run us down!"

A swift stroke of the paddle drove the canoe aside, and at this, the bull's boldness deserting him, he wore around heavily and scrambled up the bank. Breasting frantic-

ally through the brush, his antlers guarded on his shoulders, he shuffled along toward the forest, and, with a final crash of dead wood, swung away into the safe haven of the woods. For some time the two men sat there silent and wondering, while far beyond in the further fastnesses of the bush the panic-stricken lord of the solitudes fled with swinging strides.

"I'll mind him when the season opens!" cried Lewis, slatting the gunwale with a heavy hand. "Them horns then'll be worth the price of a quarter's wages o' work. That's my moose yon!"

McTaggart glared at this with uncompromising severity.

"Ye'll forgit them words, Reddy Lewis, and it's no sich thing. Him yon is Burling's moose, and if ye offer wunst to draw sight on him in these here patch o' woods, ye're no longer friend o' mine. D'ye hear?"

Lewis heard, and his jaw fell. "Five feet and a half them horns spread, and I'd like they was mine. But as you say,—as you

say,—him's Burling's moose, though 'twill be lookin' for one cloud after a rainstorm to find him when the runnin' season's on. Wait, though, wait till I find if this be where he works."

He clattered ashore, all excitement, and followed swiftly in the trail of the vanishing moose. McTaggart watched him out of sight, drew forth a pipe, and prepared to smoke. A mink came skipping along a log to keep him company, a muskrat squeaked in the bank, and overhead a flight of ducks flipped to and fro in search of lodging for the night. Once the big salmon at his feet stirred with a last shudder; then silence and the twilight settled down upon the wild, and McTaggart stretched himself in an ecstasy of comfort.

"Got ye there, Sawny McTaggart," a harsh voice croaked. "Got ye, hey!"

There almost at his elbow were Wiggin and the fish warden. They had spied him from the bend below, trying the bogan when the main river drew blank, and quietly had

crawled up behind his back. Wiggin was grinning in delight, and at the sight of the fish lying at McTaggart's feet his elation broke into a cry.

"There's the salmon, — taken red-handed, Sawny McTaggart, you poaching thief!"

"No names, there," he growled. "No names, or —"

The remainder was indistinguishable, but McTaggart's manner sufficed. He waved the spear, menacing their approach, and the canoe backed off in energetic haste.

"Don't bother him, Gower! Come away!" Wiggin gave these orders with less assurance than his first charge. "Let him be, Gower; it's felonious assault, and we'll swear out a warrant for that too."

Shaking his fist at McTaggart, Wiggin helped paddle the canoe about, when they bore swiftly away. Then Sawny threw his spear clattering into the bottom of the canoe and drew a deep breath. He was in for it. He knew Wiggin's methods and manner, and was convinced that the law

would be pushed to an extremity, and what would happen then? "Sawny! Sawny!" a hoarse whisper called to him. "Air they gone?" Lewis had returned, in time to hear an echo of the colloquy between the two canoes. He listened gloomily while McTaggart told the story, and for once was dumb. McTaggart, as Wiggin had said, was taken red-handed. He must stand the double penalty of poaching and of spearing fish, all meaning a heavy fine and perhaps imprisonment. There was no escape; even McTaggart's ready imagination failed in the face of the situation. Silently the two paddled along the breast of the rising land, looking for a "night chance" to camp, and when the fire was lighted and the kettle boiling, McTaggart at last made up his mind.

"There's no other way from out of it," he explained dolefully. "I'll jus' be takin' to the bush for want o' better; and what's to happen to Janie and the bairns, I'm thinkin', when their man's out lyin' in the woods?"

There was an answer, dark enough, to this in Lewis's face. But he shook his head without other response, and glowered into the fire. McTaggart, indeed, must take to the bush, for no other alternative but jail was offered. A day's work threw up a shack for the outlaw at the head of the big pond, where Lewis left him to paddle down river with the news. And a sad day it was for Janie McTaggart when it came, Lewis fiddling about on one foot, and making the best of it by blurting out the situation. Janie listened with troubled face, but did not weep, for she was of stronger stuff than that.

"I'd like to know what's best done," she protested. "But what is ut, I'm askin'? I'd sell the coo" (she meant cow), "but what'd the bairns be doin' for their milk? And what price 'ud it be bringin'? There's no way out, Reddy Lewis, but you to go back to the bush, and bring him in. It's sore times that the man be up in jail, but I'd rather him in it than to be gallivantin' nowheres out there wit' that empty noddle o' his'n. I'll

lave him to think it out a week, and then ye'll be goin' after him, Reddy Lewis, and no thanks to ye for lettin' him and us into days' troubles like this."

Lewis, with the shock-haired McTaggart children scrambling about his feet, could make no reply. He shambled out with hanging head, Janie's tongue lashing him down the road and out of hearing, and at the bridge he met Wiggin and Gower. They were bustling along, Gower with a paper in his hand that Lewis had no doubt was a warrant. Wiggin confronted the sullen-eyed Lewis, who brushed him aside. "Where's McTaggart?" demanded the lessee. "I want him."

"The devil ye do!" remarked Lewis coolly, with a scowl, passing on. He took satisfaction in the belief that when Janie McTaggart had heard their mission she would wind a blast about their ears that would add some comfort to the oppressed when he heard of it. But, after all, it was little help for the outlaw. With his uncheer-

ful thoughts for company, McTaggart was tramping the solitude far up at the head of the river, and dark times were in store for his clan. A week later, Lewis struck into the woods. Things were in a fair way to set the McTaggarts emigrating across the line, and this dark thought was in his mind when he overhauled Gower lurking along the river in quest of other poachers. He pushed his canoe into an eddy and lay there watching, too, when Gower swung about and saw him.

“Mornin’, Gower,” Lewis called doubtfully.

But Gower did not resent his appearance. His brow was drawn and troubled, and care clung about him with oppressive weight.

“Oh, is it Reddy Lewis only?” he mumbled.

“Ay — only Reddy; and did ye think the lost angel was claimin’ ye for yer sins, Terry Gower?”

Gower drew up his setting pole and pushed his canoe abreast of Lewis, where he clung, staring into the ripping current.

"What's the news?" Then without waiting he branched off into a new drift, rambling about from one thing to another, from the last run of fish to a bank beaver working in the upper dead water. Lewis eyed him stoutly, and then took matters into his own hands. "What's up wit' ye now, Terry Gower; and if ye're thinkin' o' Sawny McTaggart, it's an evil day's work ye done there, what wit' his wife and childern."

Gower sniffed, while he looked uneasily about him. "Not that, Reddy, it's not that!" he cried sharply. "The Whooper's come back. I seen him!"

Lewis was prone to laugh, but, notwithstanding, his belief in the Whooper improved. "What's that,—the Whooper and ye've seen him?" Gower nodded dully. Somewhere in the past a strain of Indian had been infused into the Gower line, and now it showed in the man's low superstition. He was even trembling, and with little pressure told his tale. He had gone up to the big pond just before nightfall to get a mess of trout, and

while at the work a figure had emerged from the woods.

"It had a red gash acrost it. I was sittin' on the big log — ye'll mind ut at the spring hole — when of a sudden I feel all creepy-like. Lor'! I looks up, there's the Whooper beyant! Wit' that it screamed — ah-r — awful! Saints that be, I fell backwuds, and ut screamed agin. God forbid I live to see the like of it afterwards!" He pressed his hands over his ears as if to shut out the dread horror of the Whooper's cry, the echo of its shuddering scream, while Lewis sat back gaping at his fear.

"Terry Gower," he delivered impressively, "ye're the fust to see the Whooper wit' mortal eye. Ye're doomed, man — doomed — and may the saints have mercy on ye that have sinned sore. D'ye remember Tighe, the teamster?"

He pushed on up the river with a lurking grin, leaving Gower crouched in the canoe; and at nightfall found McTaggart camped out on the pond. "Ye're to come home,"

he announced. "Janie swears she'll not be bidin' alone by the house wit' you to be cuttin' didos elsewhere. Ye're to come in, and I'm minded the jail's fine to what ye'll feel when yer wife's clapped eye and tongue to ye, Sawny."

"What's else for the news, Reddy?" asked McTaggart, gloomily.

"Gower's seen the Whooper," was the prompt answer. "What I was sayin' to ye ye'll remember, Sawny McTaggart, and the Whooper's in the woods."

McTaggart questioned, and then burst into a fit of laughter. Lewis believed the other's wits gone, until McTaggart drew out of his merriment with a jocose gleam in his eye. "'Twas I, ye dummy!" he tittered. "I seen him fishin' by the spring hole, and but tried him wit' a screech, bein' in mem'ry o' his lunny failin's. And the Whooper was wearin' a bloody gash, eh? Ay, 'twas this," and here he stuck a thumb under the lonesome red suspender, and snapped it against his chest. But, much

against his will, he followed Lewis into the settlements, there to take his punishment. In matters of this order, Wiggin was hardly laggard. He pursued McTaggart into court with a jeer, and swore down upon his head every heinous detail of the offence, omitting only the assault, which he reserved for future reference. But justice, though swift, was lenient, McTaggart's previous good character serving him considerably. Yet the fine imposed was a facer, and when this judgment was set forth he was appalled at the figure.

"A fine, — ay! Then ye'd best be lockin' me up the day. D'ye think I can pay that offhand like as if I made money in me cellar?"

He was resolved, moreover, to stand imprisonment rather than to pay, but at this juncture Janie McTaggart stepped in with a firm and decisive tread. "Ye think ye'll be loafin' in the lockup, eh?" she demanded caustically. "D'ye think ye'll lave the babes and me to nibble our fingers for a dinner?"

Ye've not the money, I'll grant, but it's a slippery mind ye have under that furze thatch o' yourn, and I'll thank ye, Sawny McTaggart, to think us out o' this, bein' that ye brung us to it unwillin' as a lamb to slaughter. Sorrow on the day that took ye and that other light o' folly, Reddy Lewis beyant, moon-chasin' into the woods together. Speak up, I say!"

"Ay, I'll speak. D'you know where's the money to be got? Am I a banker from the States, that I can be writin' it all over the face o' a sheet o' paper? The best I'll be doin' is to give Day, the storekeeper, my hand o' wrote to a mortgage that I'm as like to pay as the whole national debt o' the univarse. What's now?"

Janie threw her apron over her head and groaned. His suggestion that he must give the farm as security read like all the awful fiction in the farm newspapers that runs hand in hand with Hubbard squash, sheep rot, ensilage, and valentine verses. She loved her home, and to pawn it for

whatever purpose seemed to her to be like sitting on the doorstep and bidding disaster step in. McTaggart considered the proposition gloomily, for there was little work in the woods till the fall shooting began, and how could he pay off the debt? Yet there was no other way. McTaggart shrewdly kept clear of giving a mortgage, pointing out that the farm was there, and he'd not be making way with it overnight, and Day, who knew the man's rugged honesty in business affairs, was willing enough to advance the money on a note. But when McTaggart saw the interest to be paid, he was horrified and showed it after his manner. "Ye're good at figures, Mister Day. Eh,— what's that? Oh, I'm but notin' the intrust to be paid."

With the proceeds from this venture, McTaggart paid his fine, and for an hour breathed freer. Yet it was with heavy heart that he slouched home, and besought his wife to give him peace. "There'll be work yet, Janie, if ye're not drivin' me first to a

bedlam. Have done, and give me a bite to eat." Convinced that there was no remedy in sitting with idle hands, she bestirred herself; though with the odour of cooking there was wafted in from the cookroom a monotone of subtle compliments upon McTaggart's self-conscious character. But there is an end to all things, and Janie's garrulous complaint ceased abruptly at a thundering knock upon the door, that flung open before the answer, admitting Lewis.

"Ye'll git,—git out quick!" he cried. "Wiggin's that mad ye've got off wit' a fine he's took out a warrant for assault. Ye'll mind wavin' the spear at him out beyant the day av it all? Git—there's no time to be lost!"

McTaggart stared stupidly, hardly able to comprehend. But Lewis drove him to haste. Wiggin was determined to hunt McTaggart to the end, and there was no time, indeed, to lose. Without the pause for a sober, second thought, they flung his things together, and once more McTaggart

took to the bush, leaving Janie, sick at heart, alone in the cabin by the river. Out there in the wilderness, her husband faced the blank solitude, sick and sore at heart, and thus the summer passed with deeper woe confronting. Burling, said Lewis, would be along soon, and then there would be an end to the difficulty. But the weeks sped by, and Burling did not come. Week after week slipped by; the shooting had begun, but there was no work for McTaggart. An outlaw, driven to the woods to keep his liberty, was not exactly the sort of guide to inspire confidence in strangers. None of the shooting parties would engage him, though Lewis tried many. So McTaggart settled down doggedly to wait until Burling should appear, and, in the meantime, hunted about in search of the big bull they had seen that eventful day. And just after the calling began he found the trail. The bull was keeping the long ridge far across at the Gulquock, still unmated and ranging widely, day and night, in search of a responsive cow. Mc-

Taggart knew the track at a glance, for one point of the hoof had been broken, and its bigness was unmistakable. He followed, marking the bull's direction, and on the edge of a small black pond tried him with the horn. At the first low call, the moose answered eagerly, and came rioting down to the water's edge, where he thrashed the bushes with his heavy horns, and, at a responsive grunt from McTaggart, rushed out into the open.

"Lors!" murmured McTaggart, viewing the breadth and bulk of the spreading antlers, "it's my sowl I'd be givin' to have Burling see him wunst."

He left the bull unmolested, convinced that he would not wander far from the clustering chain of ponds, and his next adventure was to find Wiggin and Gower in the woods. McTaggart, prowling along the ridge, keeping watch and ward over his big bull, spied the two stealing through the timber. He hid behind a windfall, watching, and, to his consternation, saw

them strike upon the trail where the moose had passed a short time before. Gower, with an exclamation, pointed to the slot, and, stooping over the marks in the soft earth, the two men ranged back and forth, all excitement. Then Gower waved the way the bull had gone, and with rapid strides they went circling off to leeward in full pursuit. McTaggart followed, clinging to the cover, the chase dipping down toward the pond. But here they lost the trail, running afoul, instead, of McTaggart's lean-to.

"Oh, and what's this?" he heard Wiggin demand of Gower, as he crawled near, Gower, busily pulling over McTaggart's things, determined soon enough. With that, Wiggin's face was convulsed with anger.

"I'll have no such vermin in the woods with me!" he cried, sticking a foot through the side of the bark hut. McTaggart, with a malediction, threw up his gun to his shoulder, and levelled the sights at his enemy. But a swift thought of Janie and

his helpless children stayed the shot, and Wiggin never knew how near he had been to sudden death. Tiring of kicking at the sides of the lean-to, he whipped a match out of his pocket, and touched it to a bit of curling bark. He held the splinter downward until it blazed and crackled, and Gower, nonplussed at his employer's vindictiveness, asked what he was intending, "If ye're goin' to burn him out," he remarked, "ye'll leave the man no place to lay his head. He'll soon be homeless elsewhere, Mister Wiggin, for I mind hearin', now, that there's next to a mortgage on the farm below he's never like to pay."

"He has what?" demanded Wiggin. "And you have not told me this before. Out with it!"

His manner was crafty and eager. He ground out the blazing bark with his heel, and extracted fact after fact from his man. Then, gripping his gun, he strode off through the woods, bidding Gower follow. "But the moose—the big un," the man protested.

“ Devil take it ! ” growled Wiggin, striding on through the forest. They reached their camp, threw their things hastily into a canoe, and pushed off. At nightfall, the day after, the two reached the settlements, when Wiggin’s eager inquiries found that there were hard times, indeed, at the McTaggarts’. Janie had told her sorrow and care to the neighbours, for the simple-hearted creature was in sore need of sympathy. She had drawn her children about her, weeping, when a ready-tongued gossip came with consolations and a real desire for details. In a month the note would fall due, and she saw no escape. Wiggin heard all this on his way to the settlement store, where, eager and malevolently grinning, he demanded to see Day.

Mrs. Day admitted the visitor, embarrassed at the condescension of a call. “ Come right in, Mr. Wiggin, come right in. Have a cheer and sit by. Yes, sir, my man’s right out to the barn. ’Pears the air’s gittin’ sharp — hey? Yes, sir, I was — ”

Wiggin inwardly cursed her volubility, cut her short, and sent for Day. The man came in, and the two adjourned to the front room, leaving Gower in the kitchen with his legs sprawling and his mouth open in wonder at his employer's vindictive pursuit. Wiggin began the business without formalities. He wished to know what Day would take for the note; and when Day stared in astonishment rapped out the question again, sharply, insistently. The storekeeper demurred, Wiggin insisted, threatening to withdraw his trade; and the upshot of the matter was that he got the note, paying a stiff bonus for the privilege. It was irregular, unjustifiable, and all that, but Wiggin went out of the place, vengeance stirring in his breast, and an evil day awaiting the McTaggarts when their oppressor's opportunity should fall due.

More days passed in gloom. Wiggin and Gower had returned to the woods, and the inevitable was drawing nigh. The last week in September, Lewis, going into the

post-office, found a letter. "How long's this been waitin'?" he asked, recognizing Burling's handwriting. He tore it open, read it rapidly, read it again, and then, crumpling it in his hand, walked slowly out. Burling was not coming into the woods; he had written to say it was impossible. On the way up the road he met Janie, but had not the heart to tell her then. "No news," he murmured, shaking his head and walking on. He launched a canoe dejectedly, put his things aboard in a disordered heap, and started out for the woods. He must tell McTaggart, and what should happen now was only too painfully obvious. He poled along, thoughtful and gloomy, utterly downcast over the prospects for the McTaggarts, who in his affections were as his kith and kin. At the head of the river, he plunged into the forest in search of McTaggart's camp, and in a hollow at the foot of a hill saw some one slinking through the bush. Just as he looked he saw the figure dodge behind a tree, and at this semblance of suspicion

Lewis himself was aroused. "Who's there?" he cried sharply. It was Gower, who, finding himself discovered, stepped out into the open. "Oh, it's you, is it?" exclaimed Lewis, disgustedly; "and what's up now, I'm askin'?" Gower hastened toward him, holding out a hand that Lewis ignored. "You seem ready to hide yerself, Terry Gower, and what's in the wind?"

Gower shuffled about from one foot to the other, uneasily looking over his shoulder. "Well," he hesitated, "I seen a moose — an' a mighty big un — horns so big!" He stretched his arms to indicate the breadth of the antlers. "Mister Wiggin seen him, too, but sorter got the staggers. Lor', he couldn't shoot at all!" Lewis looked at him keenly, for the man's eyes were shifting uneasily toward the thicket at the foot of the hill. Lewis's mind was made up that the man had something to conceal, and in a few minutes determined that it lay within the clump of bushes. "Ye've had luck!" he ventured suddenly, and leaned forward

to touch Gower's knife. "Why," he exclaimed, "it's covered all wit' blood!"

Gower's face was a study of stupidity and craft. He shook his head, denying the assertion vehemently; but when Lewis walked swiftly toward the thicket, turning a deaf ear to Gower's protests and appeals, a jet of blood along the brown autumn leaves confirmed his opinion that something was amiss, and a search showed he was right. There in the thicket lay the half-stripped carcass of a fat cow moose, and to kill a cow is a grievous offence against the statutes. "So it's this, Terry Gower!" cried Lewis sharply, "ye was tryin' to hide! And d'ye know it's a big fine and mebbe jail for the man that kills the cow moose?" Gower appealingly asserted that it was not his work. Lewis laughed, telling him to try that on the marines. "Not yer work, eh? And what's this axe o' yourn doin' standin' here by a tree, and is that yer gun yon or no, Terry Gower? Mebbe not, or have the gun and the axe been out for but a stroll in the

woods, and stopped by for a rest? Ah-r! Don't be lyin' like that!"

"I tell ye 'twas not me!" Gower reiterated. "Ye'll not be peachin', will ye, Reddy, for the guv'ment 'd be sore after me, its own warden. What's the woman and her childer to do then?"

"Did ye think av that, Terry Gower, when ye laid throuble thick to the door o' Sawny McTaggart? — answer that now!"

"Ah-r, 'twas not me, though! 'Twas Mr. Wiggin, Reddy, that did that; he's yon in the camp now, and 'll tell ye!"

A sudden thought transformed Lewis's face with cunning. "Wiggin, yon, shot the cow, too!" he cried, with a strong conviction. "I've guessed it," — this shrilly, — "and ye'll not be lyin' agin, Terry Gower."

Gower nodded; Wiggin had killed the cow. They had called down the big bull the night before, but a cow had come with him. Gower coaxed and pleaded on the horn for hours, knowing from the marks they had seen on the range that the bull was big. But

though eager to flirt with another cow, the bull was old and suspicious, and went circling about in the darkness trying to get their scent on the dead night air. Just as they thought they had him coming out into the open, the companion cow tired of the struggle with her lord, and rushed in to investigate. She almost charged the two in their canoe, and, discovering the peril, fled, crashing through the bush, thoroughly scaring the big bull. In vengeful anger at this interruption, Wiggin fired on her just as she charged the bank, and planted a bullet in her ribs. She fell, struggled to her feet, and went on, and at dawn Gower had tracked her to the place where she at last lay down and died.

"Yer camp's right handy across, eh?" asked Lewis. "Then I'll be payin' a visit to Mr. Wiggin." He announced this with emphasis, deaf to Gower's objections, and, knowing the way, led on through the forest. Wiggin was cleaning his rifle when they arrived, and seemed perturbed at the sight of Lewis. He nodded coldly, and went on with

his work, while Lewis, sitting on a fire log, pulled out his pipe and gravely filled it. "What luck?" he demanded when he had finished. He leaned forward to pull an ember from the fire, his eyes wandering from Wiggin, while he puffed deliberately at the tobacco.

"Luck?" snapped the other, "none at all."

"Dunno—that's a big cow ye got down yonner."

Wiggin shot a sharp and angry glance at Gower, who dropped his eyes in guilty consciousness. "Blast it, man, what d'you mean?" demanded Wiggin.

"Nothin', Mr. Wiggin. Cow killin' is agin the laws, though. They took up two fellers on the Wabsky las' week, I hear, for doin' the same."

"Well, my friend, I suppose you are now going in to lodge an information—hey?"

"Dunno," answered Lewis, slowly. "Got any reasons why I hadn't oughter?"

Wiggin put down his gun and looked him over. He cleared his throat huskily, and

apparently thought hard. "Now suppose," said he, "that it was made worth your while to let this drop?" Lewis asked how, and Wiggin told him.

"Want to buy me — hunh?" he snorted. "Think ye can buy me, hey?"

"Every man has his price," was the answer. Wiggin's philosophy included this assumption in a developed degree, and now he was disposed to give it exercise. "Every man has his price," he repeated. "Mine's high," answered Lewis. Wiggin named a figure that to him seemed reasonably high. Lewis named one higher. He was mentally calculating the amount of McTaggart's note with interest to date, and the price he named was even more. So they sat there, haggling, while Gower, out of hearing, looked on gloomily. In the end, Lewis got his price, and Wiggin prepared to write a check.

"Is it a check?" inquired Lewis. "Ye'll save the bother, Mr. Wiggin, for I'll not take it. I want money — hard cash it is, or nothin'!"

Wiggin laughed lightly, remarking that Lewis seemed to be an old hand in such affairs to have fear that a check might be used against him. "You've done this before, maybe?" he sneered.

"No, Mr. Wiggin, wit' all ye know av these things, ye're wrong. It's the first."

He got the amount in money, slung his gun over his shoulder, and walked off whistling a cocky air. "Good-by, Gower, and look out the Whooper don't get ye! Better luck next time, Mr. Wiggin," he called back, turning to wave an airy adieu; but Wiggin merely cursed.

McTaggart's camp was deserted, but a square of birch bark set in a cleft stick told where he had gone. He was away tracking the bush, he said, looking to find where the moose were working, and would be away a couple of days. Lewis's elation subsided suddenly. He was primed to push the roll of bills into McTaggart's hand, and to end his melancholy at once. But where could he find him? He hopped up and ran to where

McTaggart kept his canoe. It was gone, and Lewis knew from this that the other would stick to the watercourses; so, shouldering his pack, he pushed along in pursuit, but by chance going precisely in the wrong direction. He spent two days in this pursuit, and then, convinced how futile was a search in the interminable system of interlacing dead waters, bogans, and ponds, returned to the still vacant camp. Here he spent another two days, fretting and fuming over McTaggart's absence, and then went cruising the bush again. But McTaggart had gone far, and the week had passed before he returned to the camp on the big pond. Lewis was away at the time, but McTaggart rejoiced in a letter that told he would return the following day. Weary and discouraged, he prepared his evening meal, and then turned in to sleep heavily.

The moon arose, big and bright, while the dead forest lay silent under the clear gray light. On the pond, it silvered the wake of the plying muskrat, and set the water gleam-

ing where the trout lunged along the sandy shallows. But before the moon had cleared the rim of the distant hills, the silence was broken by a pealing murmur. It came soft and dreamily first, and then with the repeat droned higher over the sleeping solitude. McTaggart rolled over in his blankets, and awoke with a sudden shudder. He cocked his ear and listened. A cat-owl boomed far away, and a muskrat flopped in the pond with a splash that set his heart thumping against his ribs. Once more the low note sounded. It was a cow moose calling — no, a sudden inflection set his mind at rest. It was some one using a horn, trying to call out from his retreat the lord of the woodland ranges. Softly launching a canoe, McTaggart stole down the pond, clinging to the black shadow alongshore, and awake to the chance that they might fire on him in the dark by mistake. Softly he pushed along till he heard a bark horn rattle against the cedar splints of a canoe bottom and a rustle as some one rose. Again the

call droned across the stillness, echoing upon the hilltops and beating back from ridge to ridge. On the quiet air it drifted afar, stillness again following in its wake. *E-ee-ee-uu-oooo-O-oonh!* McTaggart listened, and then — *Unh! Unh!* — a bull grunted the answer.

“There!” a shrill whisper proclaimed. “I hear him!”

McTaggart was near enough to distinguish the tone; it was Wiggin. Again the bull grunted, and, slowly drifting to the bank, McTaggart crept ashore. As he dragged the canoe after him its bilges scraped upon the bushes, and a sharp exclamation — a whisper of warning — told that the others had heard. He held his breath and waited.

“Ain’t nawthin’ but a mushquash, likely,” he heard Gower explaining after a pause. “I’ll tell ye if the moose comes in. Don’t shoot ’les’ it’s the big un.”

He called again, and once more the bull answered. He was coming fast. McTag-

gart heard the moose swing over the ridge and plunge down toward the pond. His horns clanged against the tree trunks as he pressed onward; a dry stub cracked as he surged against it, and at every other stride he grunted — *unh!* — *unh!* — *unh!* Then, halfway down the slope he paused, quiet as a mouse, and only the distant booming of a cat-owl broke the stillness drifting down upon the night.

“*E-unh! E-unh!*” Gower was trying him again. The muffled note whined dolorously, simulating with a keen inflection the gurgling of a complacent cow. Even McTaggart admitted the man’s woodcraft, and “*Unh! Oonh!*” the bull answered, beating his antlers upon the saplings. But, old and suspicious, the moose waited to make sure before plying his courtship further. McTaggart heard their canoe creak as Gower cautiously moved; then slosh! slosh! slosh! close at hand. He started. But it was not the bull; it was Gower imitating with his paddle the tramp

of a cow upon the shallows. The moose grunted fiercely; there was a crash in the brush, and peering through the undergrowth McTaggart saw a black form stride out upon the bog. With a rending of dry wood and a resounding splash, the bull stepped down into the dead water, his head held aloft and swinging from side to side. His nose, stretched out, ranged upward trying the air with a deep breath, while the broad antlers lay back upon his bristling shoulders. McTaggart stared, a sudden thought suggesting that this might be the big bull returned again to his old ranging ground, the big bull he had been watching for Burling's sake. He saw the others' canoe drift out from the shadow, Gower, with noiseless strokes, driving it down upon the quarry. Along the bank strode the bull, grunting once as he searched on all sides for the wooing cow he had heard from his haunt high up among the hard wood. As he turned, the moonlight shone upon his horns. McTaggart started, an

exclamation breaking from him. It *was* the big bull. In the dim light he watched the canoe drift slowly forward, while his heart beat wildly as he awaited the crack of the rifle. Then, clenching his teeth, he leaped upright, and screamed with all the strength of his lungs.

A startled cry answered. The bull, splashing across the shallows, halted snorting. McTaggart screamed again. A flurry overwhelmed the canoe; he saw Gower struggle to his feet. "The Whooper!" screamed the man, and tumbled backward into the stream. Crash followed crash—the bull, leaping to the shore, burst his way through the thickets. Trembling but satisfied, McTaggart lay upon the ground clutching the pulpy moss, while the moose bounded up the slope, his horns clanging on every tree trunk, the thickets crashing beneath his tread.

Dawn came. Wiggin and Gower sat in camp—Gower, his clothes drenched, leaning over the fire vainly seeking warmth

and dryness; Wiggin enraged and scornful.

"The Whooper, eh?" He glared at Gower, his lip curling. "You fool!" The man sullenly wagged his head and crouched lower over the blaze. His hair, dull and matted, hung over his low brow, its blackness contrasting the pallor of his face. With his eyes shifting about, he answered heavily, "No, sir — no — no, don't say that. I see Tighe when the Whooper got him. Oh, sir — oh — oh —" His voice broke into whimpering. "I seen him and it was orful. I seen him lying limp in the snow wit' the red mark acrost his throat, and, way off in a black swamp, the Whooper was howlin' and hollerin' like a lunny. Ugh-r — it was orful, sir!"

He shuddered anew, bending still closer to the cheerful, crackling blaze. Even the daylight failed to clear his terror. Wiggin, as contemptuous as ever, demanded whether he had ever seen the Whooper, and Gower cried please God that he never should again.

Wiggin laughed mockingly. "You get into that canoe, Gower; we'll see what tracks your Whooper leaves."

"Oh, sir — please!"

Wiggin cut him short. Baffled and trembling, Gower launched a canoe, and steadied it until Wiggin walked aboard. Then, under direction, he paddled down the pond and into the head of the dead water toward the scene of the night's frantic doings. Wiggin eyed the situation keenly; he marked the slots in the mud where the bull had walked out into the open; then further on his attention was directed to a broad track in the bank.

"There!" he exclaimed. "What's that?"

Gower looked. To his accustomed eye the trail told its own story. "A canoe — some un's hauled ashore there!" He was all excitement, and with a strong stroke drove in to the bank. There in the soft ground he made out moccasin tracks, and with an oath leaned forward to pick up a pipe.

"By God!" he cried. "That's Sawny McTaggart's pipe or I'm a liar!"

"No — not McTaggart's, Gower. It's the Whooper's, and what sort of tobacco does the thing smoke?"

Gower's face was livid with passion, and all the craft and cunning hatred of his remote Indian ancestor burned upon his brow. He ground his teeth, and, with a gesture of rage, hurled the pipe far from him. "Hush! Listen!" exclaimed Wiggin, raising a warning finger. "What's that?"

He kneeled behind a bush on the bog, his eyes glittering. Then Gower, watching this pantomime of expression, saw his face twitch. He pointed a finger across the pond, and Gower looked. There was McTaggart paddling alongshore, and watching sharply ahead. He saw their canoe drawn up on the bank, and halted. He had returned, no doubt, to look for his pipe; and the sight was too much for Gower. He sprung to his feet, snatched

the rifle from Wiggin's hands, and sent a bullet ringing across the water. The forest roared with the echoes of the explosion, the empty shell leaped upward from the breech, and Gower fired again. But his rage destroyed his aim, and, ere murder could be done, Wiggin knocked up the muzzle and snatched the rifle from his hands.

"You fool!" he screamed into Gower's ear. "He was as good as caught. Damn you—stand away from me!"

McTaggart, with a derisive wave of his hand, whirled his canoe about and made off down the pond. But he was hardly out of range when a shout brought fresh alarm. A figure came out of the woods and waved to him, and for an instant he thought either Gower or Wiggin was pursuing, and crouched lower to escape the expected shot. But the shout was repeated, and looking again he saw it was Lewis. With galloping strokes he drove his craft ashore.

"They tried murder!" he cried. "They were shootin' at me!"

"Heavens, then, be praised!" exclaimed Lewis, "I thought they were shootin' the big bull. Is that all, Sawny?"

But McTaggart was in earnest, and in a few words he made Lewis understand what had happened. "Murder, ye say!" roared Lewis, "and by him yon? The divvil—I'll fix him!" He put McTaggart into the bottom of the canoe, bidding him lie hidden, and drove back to the head of the dead water. "If they try shootin' on me," he promised, "I'll satisfy them!" Boldly he paddled up to the bank, where Wiggin and Gower still stood, the employer venting his spleen upon the other's head. "Drat ye, be still, ye loafer!" cried Lewis, after listening a moment to Wiggin's words. "Yes, it's ye, I mean—I'll have a word wit' ye, me man! Ye've been tryin' murder, is it?"

"A good thing, too," was the answer. "That sneaking poacher would be better off with a bullet in his ribs. I'll see him into jail, now, and make sure of him!"

“And ye’ll follow into it after him, *Mister Wiggin*,” responded Lewis, sharply. “Ye know that ye cannot shoot at a man as ye please even out here in the woods. I grant it, ye’ll be sure o’ mind what a jury down river’ll say to ye, *Mister Wiggin*, wunst they get ye afore ’em. Ye mind that, eh? Ye and yer man, there, is not much liked — eh, my friend, — and what’ll happen when murder’s the charge?”

The warning was strong with meaning. Wiggin glanced at him, wondering what was the next to come, and on that score Lewis soon set him at rest. “I’ll throuble ye, Wiggin,” — he had dropped the deferential prefix and was slanging the other without regard, — “I’ll throuble ye to hand over the warrant ye have agin Sawny Mc-Tággart, or I’ll be down, the day, to the justice, and have ye properly took up.”

Assuming a cool and independent attitude, Lewis pulled out his pipe once more, watching Wiggin sharply over his fingers as he touched a match to the tobacco.

"How about it—eh?" he demanded, whiffing out the light. In Wiggin's face anger and self-possession struggled for mastery. Lewis fixed him with an unflinching eye, and Wiggin, cursing under his breath, drew out the warrant, tore it across, and tossed the fragments into the stream. "I've not done with the dog yet, though," he warned, his face wrinkling craftily, and at this McTaggart sat bolt upright in the canoe. Wiggin greeted him with a curse.

"Ah-r, there you are—eh! You've escaped jail, my man, but you wait—you wait!" Here he shook his fist vindictively at McTaggart's head, grinning with malevolence. "Mark me—at the end of the month, when you're turned out of house and home—thrown out, mind you—just remember me!"

"Ye'll rest content I'll never forget ye!" retorted McTaggart. "I misdoubt ye mean the note now—hey?"

Wiggin chuckled jubilantly. "Right you are, Sawny McTaggart. I've got you there,

for I've bought the note from Day, and I'll drive you from the place when I'm done." He drew out the note and waved it tauntingly, but Lewis cut in with a hoot of disdain. "Pass up that note there!" he cried, noting that Wiggin was waving it in McTaggart's face. "Pass it along here!" he roared. Before the other knew, he had reached across and snatched the paper from Wiggin's hand. "There, now, and this is the money for it, ye pawnbrokin' thief." He tossed the roll of bills into the canoe, and, driving his own craft about, paddled down the pond, McTaggart wild with curiosity. "It's nothing," Lewis casually remarked; "I but caught him in evil and made him pay for it." He told the story, and McTaggart protested. "But, Reddy, it's a jail offence — it's blackmail — and he'll have the law on ye." But Lewis was as derisive as ever. "He'll have no laws on me, and what odds if he do? I've no wife or childer, and a trip to the lockup will be but food and fun for the price o' nawthin'."

"Worry be the day," moaned McTaggart, "ye've shifted my sins to yer own head."

"Sure, Sawny, and now we'll be goin' arter the big moose — hey, man?"

In the dusk of a gray afternoon, a week later, a moose with horns spreading like the limbs of a wasted pine was pawing potholes in the runway at the foot of a wooded hill. His flying strokes flipped the leaves and soggy soil high over his haunches, and at times he paused to beat a sapling with his antlers. A twig cracked sharply on the hill, and at this, transformed into a statue, he stood, with bristling mane, staring along his flank. One ear hung forward over the beam of the broad antlers; the other quivered backward. His gray nose wrinkled while the neck stretched forth. Then a rifle cracked, the woods clattering with the detonation. Down upon his knees crashed the colossus, swaying heavily, and Sawny McTaggart, leaping the windfalls and breasting through the bush, raced down the hillside screaming like the Dungarvan Whooper.

CHAPTER IX.

LIBERTY.

A SHAFT of sunlight pierced the interlacing treetops and fell broadly upon the forest's yellow floor. Spring had come, and with it the woodland life moved anew. At the foot of the knoll a sandy brook rippled briskly through the covert, singing a quiet tune; and the air now stirred gently from the south. Higher rose the sun; the breeze died away, and with one last, listless whispering of the foliage overhead, silence reigned. Then — *putt-putt* — a sharp and querulous *putt!* Another moment's silence, and after it, as if in answer — *ye-onk — ye-onk — ye-onk!* Now what was this? Out of the thicket stepped majestically an impressive figure, a creature of cardinal crown, garbed with bronze and gold, stalking the brush like a veritable monarch of the domain. *Ye-onk*

—*ye-onk!* Craft, curiosity, suspicion, invitation—all were sounded in that sonorous yelp. *Ye-onk!* Onward stepped the regal presence, confident, yet ready to fly at an instant's warning; primed for braggart wooing—doubtful on the way to conquering. So up the hill went this majesty—forsooth, a turkey gobbler—making his way with a hop, skip, and stalking stride, his cardinal crown held sideways, and no end of expression in his undecided, mincing gait.

Putt-putt—ye-onk! That settled it. The voice of the charmer on the hilltop sounded clear and sweetly low. There could be no cheat in a seductive yelp like that. Up the last rise bustled the gobbler, all his craft suffused by the glow of amorous conquest, his fan spread in astonishing array, his wings curved sidewise, and his gallant wattles swelling in red display. Drumming noisily, he strutted the opening, and there before him stood the charmer.

Now the bar sinister of turkey bearings is a band of white across the tail; rarely found

among the wild birds of the forest depths, though every mean fowl of the farmyard shows it in its fan. So was this charmer of the hilltop marked — a recreant from some squatter cabin. But what cared the amorous knight for this? Little indeed! He spread himself before her, regardless of his other queen grubbing a breakfast in the deserted cotton patch below; and with all his bravery stalked and strutted and clucked till she was hypnotized into delirious attention. *Ye-onk!* spoke the lady love, softly, timorous in adoration. Swelling his snaky neck, he fixed a beady eye upon her, and then rang the woods with his song of love — *hee — gobble — hobble — gobble*.

Nature, with all her admirable qualities, is sometimes sadly at fault. Here, for instance, was magnificence, a bird of regal splendour, and yet voicing noble passion — with what? *Hee — gobble — hobble — gobble!* Never mind, — the demure inspiration of this obligato knew no better, and perchance would have turned a deaf and heedless ear to the swell-

ing melody of the nightingale or the sweet, melancholy pipe of a wood thrush. *Hee — gobble — hobble — gobble* was as sweet to her as any other note might be to maiden first wooed by tender lays. Plainly speaking, it's only the system that counts, and here *hee — gobble — hobble* was *it*. So, nearer came the gobbler, tuning his lay of love, and though the charmer feigned a vast indifference, pecking at the leaves and scratching them aft in a cloud, she could not restrain or resist the advance, and nearer and nearer the bold one drew. *Tutt-tutt!* said he. *Putt-clutt!* she answered, giving encouragement. Raising his sinuous crest, he bustled sideways toward her, and accordingly she squatted in the dust. *Putt!* With an eager movement, his head launched forward, and the hen squawked as his beak descended upon her naked poll with force enough, almost, to drive in her tender brains. But nevertheless she made no move to escape; victory was his. *Putt!* the descending blow fell upon her writhing neck—the conquest was accom-

plished. She was his. A savage instinct — yes. Much like the human savage that wooes his bride with a club — a system — merely a system. Away to the deeper forest, now, far away from the farmyard birthplace, and behind, only the restraint of civilization exchanged for forest love and liberty.

They walked the forest glades or journeyed into the clearings. He led, and she and his other wives trailed behind. But ere long she found the dream was short. Like other majesties, this one had all the selfishness of the kind. There was a tidbit — a fat morsel — a grub or a swelling kernel. *Putt-putt!* the gobbler clucked, and again and again the hens ran up to share in the dainty. But — *putt — gobble* — he wolfed it down himself, and the *putt-putt*, it seemed, was no invitation to the feast, but merely his exultation at the find. So, too, at times, when one of his wives or another had clucked too long over some morsel haply found by herself, a long and snaky neck reached out, and the dainty

was snatched from sight. How long was this to last? Not long; one by one the four wild hens sneaked aside, and in hidden nooks laid their eggs between branching tree roots or in the shelter under some fallen log. Last of all was the demure, brown creature from the farm lands. Perhaps her heart was breaking — who knows? — for his greed and cruelty grew upon her. Nearly always he ignored her presence, carelessly; he seized upon her food, and like a dog in a manger was aroused only when some other gobbler disputed his sway. Then his wattles grew a swollen red, his gobbling high-voiced and challenging. Feathers strewed the battle ground after all these sanguinary combats; these feathered lords rushed together, struck with their heavy wings, and, desperately seizing each other's skinny crowns, tweaked until they drew the blood. Then, when the combat was done, and he by his weight and vigour had won, he strutted anew, once more simulating his first amorous courtship. But at length she no longer felt even a passing

interest in the demonstration ; and while again he was raging against another gobbler, she fled, and left him a lonely monarch, but no-wise disturbed at her defection. Hardly had he beaten off the other when, in answer to his vainglorious gobble, another hen yelped from the hilltop, coming to console him.

Back to the edge of the forest went the brown hen, alone and unattended. Place after place saw her ; at length she settled upon a sunny hillside, and in a deep thicket hid her nest. It was a simple home, — nothing but a hollow scooped among the leaves, — but so artfully concealed that one might have walked within a foot of it, unaware of her treasure that lay so close beside. In time there were eight eggs — creamy white and splotched with brown — lying among the leaves, and there she rested, encompassed by a hundred perils. Once a wandering coon shambled over the log under which she lay, and, sniffing eagerly, trailed about. But she lay still — so still that her heart beat a terrifying pulse in

that silence, ready to wage a hopeless battle against the marauder, to strive and do for her own. But the night prowler made on, and she was safe. Again, a fox came slinking down the hillside in the moonlight, dragging his bushy tail with a rustle across the leafy flooring. She heard him, and the soft footfalls of his cushioned pads struck — *trot — trot — trot* — each one a blow upon her heart. Nearer — nearer — so near he came — then he halted, crouching, so close that she could see his beady, evil eyes. In vain she flattened in her cover, spreading her wings to shield these blessed possessions, striving to hide with all her craft from the peering, malevolent gaze set upon her. Step by step — a sinuous shadow in that ghostly half-gloom — the fox drew toward her; there was a swift rush across the leaves, a crackling of brush, and the destroyer had hurled himself against her stronghold. Leaping from the place, she took a half-dozen running steps, and, soaring into flight, went blundering away through

the trees. A half-hour passed ere she dared return. Then she found two of the eggs destroyed under the foot of the enemy, and the others rapidly losing their warmth—that spark of fire she had so long sought to instil from her own feverish breast. But the fox no longer disturbed her; it was spring and he wandered far, and when again he returned, she no longer feared his cunning.

There were other perils, though, that beset her simple household. Days later, when she had left the nest for a moment's food, a sense of evil oppressed, and she hurried homeward. There were her fears confirmed, and but for her haste might, indeed, have been far worse. Something fled as she drew near—a small red form, leaping the log and scampering across the bark, scratching upward in impetuous haste. She saw it at a glance—a red squirrel—a chattering, remorseless thief, a noisy murderer. The nest was robbed; two more of the eggs were gone, and from the treetop

the miscreant gibed and jeered, buzzing taunts at her while she settled hopelessly again over her four remaining treasures. With added care and watchfulness, barely daring to leave the nest, she grew gaunt and overwhelmed with terror's torments. A wind stirring the treetops or raking along the leafy carpet filled her with anguished dismay; a breaking twig set her heart to beating wildly. Where now were the vaunted privileges of freedom? Much better the lean farmyard and the fields, and the protection that man gives to his own. So passed the days, till at length she felt the awakening lives stirring beneath her.

They came from the shell one by one, cheeping as they forced through their armoured covering—four fuzzy, scrambling chicks, scarcely able to stand, and clamouring to be fed. But instinct was there, and with it enough safety to let the mother forage anew; for at a cluck—a *putt* of warning—they buried themselves among the leaves, hidden from all but the most

patient, searching eye. Cunning was their first impulse; a hole hardly big enough to hold them was a safe haven from almost any foe, and in the close coverts no hawk was ever hatched that could stoop quick enough to reach them once they saw him coming.

For many weeks they kept to the ground, for strength, as yet, had not taught them flight. In these days they ranged near the nesting ground, squatting at the first alarm, and with eager, beady eyes looking everywhere for the danger. Or at a note from the mother hen they crouched beneath her guarding wing, and once there could safely defy all the lesser hawks, and some of the four-footed marauders too. But this security in no way remitted the least bit of her fear or watchfulness, and the sweetness of mother love that no doubt comes to every living thing of the woods was a sweetness largely alloyed with agony and unrest.

Time passed; their strength grew, and one day she led her brood into the first

of the fields. The sun, then, still hid beneath the trees, but a dull glow had betokened his rising, and dawn was close at hand. So through the dewy grass they went, regardless of the wet that would have brought to an untimely end more delicate chicks of the farmyard; and in the edge of the opening, the brood foraged widely. *Putt*—here was a swelling grain; *putt*—here a fat ant, a grub, or a tender blade of green. At each call, the chicks came bundling forward, and, between times, looked out for themselves. The light grew; it was day. The air settled, soft and warm; they ranged wider. Watching, ever wakeful, fear her first instinct and dread ever in her heart, the old bird kept guard, at every step turning her eyes in all directions. Disaster might fall out of the clear skies, or dart, unheralded, from the neighbouring copse. Or again—a writhing, sinuous band of black—a snake—squirmed along the neighbouring furrow; and in dire terror she fled, followed by her brood-

lings. Peril was everywhere—on every side—in the heavens above, on the earth below. But food is the first principle of life, and to live, the wild things, even in mortal terror, must feed. So, harried from one covert to another, they worked along the forest edge, and the sun rose high above the trees.

Who could see the light shadow that fell across the earth, swooping from over the trees swiftly into the clearing? It came, an emblem of destruction, hovering for an instant; then it marked its prey, and stooped. The mother hen saw it, poised for the rushing stoop, called, and a trio of fluffy bodies nestled beneath her wing. But the fourth—too far away—looked upward, saw the bolt falling out of the blue, and, palsied with fear, crouched on its nerveless little legs. Yet while that falling form was still in mid-air, instinct nerved it, and with a blind, mad exertion, it ran again, falling and blundering, toward that protective haven. A flip of a distended wing—a

swift, astonishing flight—a sudden turn; the air *rustled* as the hawk swerved, and the tragedy was done. One frightened appealing note, a small voice of terror, and away, upward, went the murderer, flapping with heavy flight toward its aerie in a treetop.

They fled, the survivors, hiding in the darkest thicket of the wood. No need to stay and look longer upon the tragic scene, the trail of feathers that flew listlessly drifting down the gentle breeze. Away from it—away from that orgy of nature—that life that lives in death. Overwhelmed, they crouched, quivering, in their forest haunt, mad with fresh terror each time the wind swept rushing through the tops. From there they heard the hawk's shrill whistle, and his shadow fell across their hiding-place as he swooped wheeling over the trees. Three, now, were left; and for them—what? A moment's respite, perhaps, and after that—

Day waned, and as the shadows trooped across the woodland, they perched among the trees. But even here the mother's fear

felt no rest; she hid her head beneath her wing in quest of sleep, awakening fitfully at every sound in the darkling wood. So, beset on every side, the little brood sought safety in numbers, and in one of the big bottoms joined the other flock. But even here there could be no peace, for the brown creature found that her one-time gallant was, after all, little better than a braggart boor, an overmastering, self-centred creature of selfish purpose. Whenever a hen clucked to the fledglings, calling them to the feast, he darted in at an eager run, snatching the morsel and masterfully trampling the chicks whenever they came into his way. Thus the spring passed on, summer came, and the young birds essayed their first cumbersome flight. They learned that *putt-putt* is a warning if pitched in a certain key, and, whenever the note gave warning, they spared no time to look about—to try what way the danger came—but with a short, swift run leaped into the air, and went soaring off

among the trees. Yet even this accomplishment could not master the dangers of the earth, and another tragedy befell. The early morning passed, and the flock, straggling in from the sandy river bottom, had just reached the edge of the woods. Easy and confident, the three young ones straggled through the thickets, disregarding the old hen's querulous, anxious complaint. Why, indeed, should they forever keep beneath her wing when here was the whole forest before them—a world to prospect and discover, stored with rich treasure of delicacies. *Cheep!* Here was an ant-hill brimming with fat, white grubs; *cheep!* a forgotten grain, ripe to bursting. Regardless of the distracted hen, they ran in all directions, and—*Putt! Putt!* There was no mistaking that note, a clarion of alarm. *Putt!* With one impulse, the whole flock leaped into a run, the silence broke with a thundering of wings, they soared, and away through the openings flew the affrighted birds—all but one, one of the

three. The destroyer had him—a mangy dog fox, prowling homeward after an eventless night among the farmyards far across the fields. He stood now, his fore feet planted on the quivering quarry, and his fangs gripping its writhing neck. So it struggled—once—and was still; and the dog fox, twisting it across his shoulder, leaped homeward to his earth, to the vixen and her hungry cubs lying in the hollow of the neighbouring hill. Two, now, of the fledglings were all that were left, and the mother hen, lighting on a ridge, yelped again and again until they found her, and came running forward, eager for the protection of her encircling wing.

The dire lesson was not without its result. For days afterward the two survivors kept closely to the flock, avoiding the fallen logs and hollows that might hold some lurking foe. And thus they grew, their beady eyes forever on the watch, suspicion in every movement, and a shy, crafty method in the way they crept about the woodland.

Now there was a change. The first leaves of the hardwood were touched by the autumn paint, the persimmons were ripening on the trees, and the locust had ceased his busy intonation, silenced by a killing night frost. Confidence came to the two young birds, and they, too, began to strut and to take on airs, self-reliant in craft and ready and willing to care for themselves. They strolled up from the bottoms, and, ranging along the ridges, gorged on the fat harvest of the season. There were nuts of every kind and falling seed; their crops grew heavy, their wattles glistened, and a glorious sheen displayed itself upon their plumage. Like all the other forest creatures, they were enlivened, invigorated, by the first sharp airs out of the north. Widely they tracked the ridges, with their strength daunting every four-footed marauder that tried to take them on the flank.

But there was one other enemy upon whom they had not reckoned yet. They

had just crossed to a neighbouring ridge, and were scattered, feeding upon the ground-nuts, when a warning *putt-putt!* sounded the alarm. Then there was a rush of wings, a rustle, and a cloud of flying leaves; after that, a crash that shook the forest and went banging away in echoes upon the riven air. In mid flight the old gobbler collapsed, pitched forward, and struck upon his back, stone dead. Crash! Again the gun roared, and this time the searching lead found its billet in one of the growing pair. He felt the shot strike deeply—a mortal wound—yet, spreading his wings fixedly, he sailed on, and, landing lightly, ran at full speed into the deepest thickets of the swamp. Weakness overtook him there, and he died; and that night a scavenging raccoon found a fat meal awaiting him in his chosen runway.

Vainly the mother hen yelped, once and again upon a hilltop, calling for her young. Terror-stricken, the survivor had branched off among the trees, and at nightfall an-

other flock had answered to his yelp. So he, too, was gone, and the brown hen, unheeded and unheard, at last wandered on, joining the other hens at the nightly roost.

Then fell the snow. It came first in clotted flakes, wet and clinging, turning later to powdery crystals. All night the storm held, and when the morning sun broke through a rift, the flock clung to its perch, garbed with white. But hunger pressed, and they foraged along the bottoms, scratching for the food that lay beneath the covering. It was scant provender at the best, and they wandered far, and in their wandering left behind a broad trail that told its story only too plainly to the hunter that came creeping through the brush.

The tracks led across the bottom and around the shoulder of a hill. With eager eye he scanned the trail, marking its numbered tracks. Now he held his gun forward, and stole along, scanning the open vistas before him. His prey was near and

he knew it. Straggling along, the flock made its way about the hill, unguarded and unsuspecting. But as they turned around a knoll, a sudden rustle in the brush, a black form moving swiftly from behind a tree, caught the alarmed gaze of the brown hen. *Putt—putt—putt!* She gave the alarm. Once more there was a flurry of wings; they beat their way with a rattle of dead branches through the trees, and again the forest roared with that dread thunder. Crash!—still again. The brown hen felt her wing give beneath her; she dropped, turning over, and then, scrambling to her feet, she pointed for the nearest thicket and ran, quivering with mortal fear. Dodging here and there, fleeing; driven on by heavy footfalls and a smashing of the brush, she ran as she had never run before. Well she knew that destruction was on her trail, and a backward glance showed her the man in full pursuit. But in his eagerness he forgot he had a gun, and pursued with hand outstretched.

He was close now, very close — so near she could hear him panting with exertion. His hand outstretched to grasp her, and she swerved. The next moment she had dodged into an impenetrable tangle, and, with head down, plied among the interlacing branches, while the man behind fought vainly with the brambles, cursing his stupidity, and too late chancing a snap shot as she crossed far away in the opening. At last she dropped into a walk, painfully dragging her drooping, broken wing. Sharp twinges like fire racked her, and perforce she halted, resting upon the snow. But the rest was short. A sound in the brush startled her anew; there was the man tracing out her track, following, still intent to slay. Onward the hunted creature took her way; again she stopped to rest. An hour passed; her wing had stiffened till every movement was an agony. So behind a log she squatted, watching on every side for danger, alarmed by every sound in the whispering wood.

Ye-onk! Ye-onk! A yelp sounded near at hand. She lay still, listening. *Ye-onk — ye-onk* — again! Somewhere from in the distance it was answered, so she too gave the call. *Ye-onk — ye-onk!* The sharp note pierced the silence anew, and she arose, listening, while the other turkey answered. But surely there was no peril here. She stepped forward, and slowly, cautiously, and in pain, she limped along. The other bird had drawn nearer, at regular intervals the yelping on the hilltop tolled them on. *Ye-onk — ye-onk!* The other bird was very close. She leaned down, peering through the tangle, and there on the knoll stood a gobbler, almost grown. The sun shone full upon him; his plumage glistened, and for a moment he strutted gayly, puffed out and proudly conscious. *Ye-onk!* yelped the wounded bird — *ye-onk!* It was the fledgling of the spring, now grown to a magnificent. *Ye-onk!* — she yelped again; then, close at hand, something rose from behind a windfall. She gave one glance, and, terri-

fied, halted in her track. *Putt! Putt!* A wild alarm. *Putt!* The gobbler heard. He dropped his head, clapped his wings closely to his side, and ran. Crash! A cloud of blue smoke poured down the hillside, mingling with a drift of feathers that sailed listlessly along the quiet air. Crash — bang! Again that dread-inspiring sound. Destruction was there, and the mother bird fled the place. On and on she went, the forest echoing with the exultant whoop of the hunter, a cry of joy that mocked her terror and distress. She kept the way with unimpeded haste until night drew down upon the wild. Yet even darkness bore its terrors to her frantic breast. Impeded by her broken wing, she could not roost upon the trees. Instead, she crouched in a hollow between two roots, and with wakeful eyes searched the darkness for every known foe. There the first light of the moon found her; and by its light she made out a slinking form stealing with velvet pads across the forest floor. *Sniff!* It paused. She

saw it peer about; its gaze was fixed upon her. Vainly she crouched lower; she saw it stealing nearer. A sudden flurry of leaves — a leap — an outstretched form hurling through the air! With every nerve aflame she sprang from her bed; another effort, and she had found sanctuary upon a low-lying limb. Below, the baffled fox mawed a mouthful of feathers, whining as he circled all about. Weariness overwhelmed her, but still she clung to her perch. She watched and waited, and below death squatted upon its haunches, waiting. Overhead the moon beamed in all its glory, and a myriad stars brightened the velvet sky. Peace was in the sky — peace in the air and the solemn stillness of the woods. Yet underneath lurked death, patient and resolved, scenting with that strange faculty of a beast of prey the presence of a wounded quarry. So squatting, he awaited, and the bird, her wound burning with awakened vigour, felt her grasp relaxing. Once she swayed perilously, and the dark form beneath

arose and stood with gaping, fang-distended jaws. *Yap!* He barked shrilly, and the hill answered, repeating the terror to her ears. She swayed forward—saved herself—lurched dizzily, and fell.

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